# SCHOOL PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER UNDERPERFORMANCE

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by
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## ABSTRACT

This study attempted to understand the school principal's perception about the characteristics, attitudes and behaviors of teachers who may be operating on the fringes of proficient performance. In addition, this study attempted to understand if the demographics of the school principal and the school could play a role in the type of characteristics that principals valued. Furthermore, this research also focused on the strategies principals used to address underperformance and barriers that may have faced as they attempted to address instances of teacher underperformance inside the schools they led. This study included a large sample of 410 school principals in the state of Pennsylvania from over 200 school districts.

Findings indicate that school principals valued a lack of classroom management, and poor teacher pedagogical skills and subject matter knowledge as strong indicators of underperformance. Principals also identified the use of continued formal documentation and formal improvement plans as strategies to address underperformance. In addition, principals often identified that a lack of time to work with underperforming teachers was a significant barrier as well as protections from teacher unions and a perceived lack of support from the school superintendent and school board.

In total, this research has implications for both school district leadership and school leaders. The voice of the principal is an important voice to be heard particularly when it relates to teacher quality and addressing teacher underperformance.

## DEDICATION

This work would never have been completed without the support of my family. My partner, Leslee has watched me grow professionally and personally over our 25 years together and you have always been a source of inspiration, support, and guidance. You remind me to take life “one day at a time” and I’m so blessed to have you in my life. Emma, Katie, and Matthew thanks for always believing in me and letting me do this work over the last few years. Thanks for understanding when I had to miss some events or spend my weekends writing and reading to complete this work. Finally, thank you to my parents Mike and Debbie for believing in me and teaching me at a very young age, we can do anything if we set our minds to it.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Researchers have identified that teachers may play a significant role in the academic achievement of students, meaning a high-quality teacher could make observed differences in a student's academic performance (Darling-Hammond, 1996, 2000; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010b; Leithwood et al., 2004; Rivkin et al., 2005; Stronge et al., 2011). Since teachers may impact student achievement, one goal of school leaders could be to assure that all teachers are highly effective and engage in instructional practices that can maximize student achievement. One potential problem facing school leaders is how to identify, support, and increase the performance of teachers that may be performing on the fringes of effectiveness. Teachers in this classification may not be performing high enough to maximize student achievement, but at the same time, they may not be performing low enough to be classified as completely ineffective, or worse as incompetent. Teachers within this fringe group may engage in highly effective instructional practices one day, but then perform ineffectively on another. A potential issue for school leaders is how to rate and determine the effectiveness of these teachers on their end-of-year evaluations. One potential way to help with this identification of underperforming teachers is to understand their characteristics, their attitudes and their behaviors from the lens of the school principal. Additionally, aside from the characteristics that could determine underperformance, it would be important to also understand the strategies principals use to encourage the teacher's growth and

development. Lastly, school leaders may find it valuable to understand potential barriers principals have faced as they attempted to address underperformance.

Some research has identified that anywhere from 2–20% of teachers could be defined as marginal, needing improvement, minimally effective and in general underperforming. These types of teachers are often associated with performing on the border between competency and incompetency (Menuey, 2005). Additional research places the number of ineffective or underperforming teachers closer to 5% (Ehrgott et al., 1993; Painter, 2000; Tucker, 1997). Others have defined a marginal or underperforming teacher as a teacher who is not quite good enough or of mediocre quality or second rate (Platt, 2008), and still others define underperformance as those teachers with negative attitudes about teaching and on-going classroom management issues (Ehrgott et al., 1993). Range (2016), in a survey of school administrators and superintendents, found that an ineffective teacher demonstrates an inability to relate well with students, parents, and colleagues and concluded that poor relationships were valued as a key characteristic of underperformance, more than a teacher's pedagogical skill. Kaye (2004, p. 294) went a step further and identified three different levels of teacher mediocrity. She classified "Flotsam teachers" as underperforming teachers that may have the desire and ability to improve. "Jetsam teachers" were teachers that were left behind as the educational system has changed over the years and were characterized as having a loss of hope, while "club-med teachers" were classified as teachers who were lazy, lax, and did not really take teaching far enough. Toroff and Sessions (2005) further noted that characteristics of

underperformance included weak classroom management issues and poor lesson implementation.

In general, there appears to be little consensus among school leaders as to what constitutes or classifies a teacher as needing improvement or being defined as marginal or ineffective (Dawson & Billingsley, 2000; Tucker, 1997). It may be problematic for school leaders to determine the characteristics of underperformance most closely associated with lower teacher quality. In sum, underperforming or marginal teachers appear to be teachers who are simply not performing nor impacting students as much as they could. It appears that a multitude of factors are associated with underperformance, and further research is needed.

Aside from characteristics of underperformance mentioned above, additional research has indicated that school principals themselves could play a role in teachers not being identified as underperforming despite evidence from the principal to the contrary. Specifically, in some research, teachers were identified by the school principal as not performing as well as could have been expected. However, the vast majority of those underperforming teachers still received ratings of satisfactory and were deemed to be effective despite the principal believing otherwise (Kraft & Gilmour, 2017; Mizelle, 2010; Weisberg et al., 2009). The result of teachers underperforming but still receiving satisfactory final evaluations could be worthy to study to potentially understand the reasons why principals think teachers are underperforming, but still rate them as satisfactory and effective. To further illustrate this point, a recent 2023 report issued by the School District of Philadelphia noted that approximately only 1% of its teaching staff

received ratings below proficiency (failing or needing improvement). In total 15% of the School District of Philadelphia teachers were rated as distinguished (the highest category), and 84% rated as proficient (Graham, 2023). It may be difficult to understand how only 1% of the teachers teaching in a school district are rated as needing improvement or failing. The presence of underperforming teachers in schools, where some research indicates approximately 5-20% of teachers are ineffective but only 1% receive this rating (as was the case in Philadelphia), could be cause for concern for school leaders and calls for attention and further research.

In the state of Pennsylvania (where this research was conducted), guidelines for the evaluation of educators are found in recent legislation adopted by the Pennsylvania State Legislature in 2020. Act 13 of 2020 outlines the legal requirements that administrators must use when evaluating teachers (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021). Act 13 of 2020 requires both formal and informal classroom observations by the administrator, the use of student performance data from state assessments that includes both student growth (value-added measures) and student proficiency counts, the overall school performance on state assessments (School Performance Profile), and teacher-generated performance measures (Student Performance Measures). At the end of a school year, final evaluation scores for teachers are determined from a combination of all the above measures on a scale of 0–3 (see Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1**

*Pennsylvania End-of-the-Year Teacher Rating Scale*

| Total Points | Rating |
|---|---|
| 0.00-0.49 | Failing |
| 0.50-1.49 | Needs Improvement |
| 1.50-2.49 | Proficient |
| 2.50-3.00 | Distinguished |

*Note.* End-of-the-year ratings for tenured teachers are comprised of rating scores from the School Performance Profile (SPP score), teacher observation and practice, student performance on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA), individualized education plan (IEP) goals progress and local education agency (LEA)/teacher selected measures. A maximum score after combining all these measures is 3.0. The largest percentage of a teacher's final evaluation score is derived from observation and practice which accounts for 70-100% of the final score. Non-tenured teachers' final ratings are based 100% on observation and practice and do not contain any other measures.

In summary, there appears to be an unclear consensus on what characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes constitute an underperforming teacher. Principals must wade through the multitude of data associated from direct observations, student performance on assessments, teacher-generated performance measures, and information of the school's overall performance to calculate a teacher's overall performance on a three-point scale. This type of work may be challenging for school administrators and could be worthy of further research and understanding.

## National Efforts to Improve Education and Teacher Quality

During the last 25 years of educational reform, several national efforts have been initiated to improve the quality of the nation's teaching force and improve the educational outcomes for students. The introduction of reforms such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and Race to the Top of 2011 (RTT) have attempted to mandate (under

NCLB) or encourage (under RTT) states to adopt accountability measures that connected individual student academic performance to the school districts' and individual teachers' evaluation scores (Race to the Top Act, 2011; No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2001). Both reform efforts attempted to improve educational outcomes for students and teachers using stronger accountability measures.

Beginning in 2001, the United States federal government re-authorized legislation around the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The re-authorization developed formal accountability measures for states, school districts and schools associated with the academic performance of all students with the adoption of NCLB and ushered in the accountability movement into the nation's schools (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2001).

One aspect of NCLB focused on identifying a relationship between individual student academic performance on state assessments, the school district, and individual schools. The re-authorization of ESEA focused on improving the academic performance of students by holding states, school districts and individual schools (those that received federal Title I funds) accountable for ensuring that students (specifically disadvantaged students) met high academic standards and were taught by "highly qualified teachers." One provision of the law required that states had to adopt a system of sanctions and rewards to hold districts and schools accountable for improving academic performance of children (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2001). To accomplish this goal, NCLB required annual state reading and mathematics assessments in various grades as well as a national sampling of fourth and eighth grade students from each state in reading and

mathematics using the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2001). NCLB also required school districts to disaggregate the performance data of students by various subgroupings including gender, race, and socioeconomic status. Furthermore, the law also required states to assign consequences to schools that failed to make "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) for each of these subgroups of students (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2001).

**Improving Teacher Quality**

Pertaining to national efforts to improve teacher quality, NCLB allowed states to use federal funds to improve teacher quality by assuring all children would be taught by "highly qualified" teachers by the start of the 2005–2006 school year (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2001). Furthermore, states were given flexible opportunities to promote reforms to teacher certification, alternative pathways to certification, tenure reforms, merit-based teacher performance systems, and bonuses for teachers who work in high-need subject areas such as reading, math and science as well as those that work in high-poverty schools and school districts. Under NCLB, while the definition of "highly qualified" teachers was left up to individual states, they were required to use NCLB's High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) provision to make that determination (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2001).

Some researchers indicated that states did not make significant changes to their certification requirements because of NCLB (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010b). Additionally, under the use of the HOUSSE provision some states did not want to admit they did not have "highly qualified" teachers who were certified under previous guidelines and

working in schools, so states adopted looser HOUSSE requirements to assure more teachers were deemed “highly qualified” (Porter-Magee, 2004). Furthermore, although many states adopted increased licensure examinations as a result of NCLB, there appears to be inconsistency across states regarding the minimum score required to pass the certification exam as well the number of subject area tests required to be deemed “highly qualified” (Blackford et al., 2012).

In summary, NCLB was designed to improve schools by holding states and school districts accountable for the academic performance of their students. Additionally, it also initiated the idea of improving teacher quality by holding teachers accountable through new certification requirements. Although well intended and innovative, NCLB may not have gone far enough in improving teacher quality and student academic performance. National NAEP test scores have not increased as much as was promised (Dee & Jacob, 2010), and the achievement gap in math and reading has not completely closed between white students and other racial groups as promised under the legislation (FairTest, 2015).

Additionally, there were also academic gains under NCLB that were made in the area of elementary mathematics, particularly among socioeconomically disadvantaged students, that are worthy to note (Dee et al., 2010). At the same time, some researchers concluded that much of the overall improvement results under NCLB could be attributed to schools and districts placing a larger focus on tested subjects like reading and math at the expense of other subjects (art, music, social studies, etc.) and a narrowing of the curriculum to emphasize skills tested on state assessments (Cawelti, 2006). As a result of

NCLB, some states did make significant changes to the way they certified teachers as a method to improve teacher quality. However, these changes may not have gone far enough, and a second national effort to directly address teacher quality was initiated in 2009.

**New Teacher Evaluation Procedures**

On February 17, 2009, President Barack Obama introduced legislation from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). ARRA was designed to stimulate the economy and infused over $100 billion into federal education funding with $4.35 billion set aside for a competitive grant to encourage states to adopt innovative educational reforms known as Race to the Top (RTT) (Howell, 2015).

In addition to states being required to publish the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs, a secondary focus of the RTT application process centered on linking student achievement and growth data to individual teachers in an effort to categorize the "effectiveness" of teachers (Crowe, 2011). Specifically, effective teachers were defined under RTT as those teachers whose students achieve acceptable rates (atleast one grade level in an academic year) of student growth. Crowe (2011) explains,

> To make clear the goal of this federal policy through these grants to states, the solicitation defines student growth as the change in student achievement for an individual student between two or more points in time and defines student achievement as, in part, a student's score on the State's assessments under the ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act); and, as appropriate other measures of student learning provided they are rigorous and comparable across classrooms. (p. 2)

As a result of the RTT application process and the potential large dollar amount awarded to grant winners, most states and school districts across the country implemented new

teacher evaluation systems (Steinberg & Donaldson, 2016). The RTT and NCLB reforms remained in place, and schools continued to work on improving teacher quality and student academic performance for many years after RTT was initiated.

## The COVID-19 Pandemic

In the winter of 2022, the Nation's Report Card was released, highlighting significant declines in both reading and mathematics scores for fourth and eighth grade students across the country (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2022). According to this report, NAEP scores have dropped to their lowest scores in almost 20 years (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2022). Additionally, a second national assessment has also shown similar declines in recent years. The Measure of Academic Progress Tests (MAP) growth assessments in reading and mathematics declined between the 2019–2021 school years (Kuhfeld, Soland, et al., 2022). Specifically, comparisons of MAP math results from the fall of 2019 to the fall of 2020 showed decreases compared to the years prior to 2019. By the same token, between 2020–2021 MAP math growth decreased even further than the drops found in the 2019–2020 year. Although not as significant, MAP reading assessments also showed similar decreases. MAP reading results from the fall of 2019–2020 were somewhat steady. However, declines increased between the fall of 2020 to the fall of 2021 (Kuhfeld, Soland, et al., 2022).

Equally important, state assessments and local school-based interim assessments showed declines in both reading and math scores during the period of 2019–2021. Specifically, in the state of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) showed declines in both reading and mathematics for the majority of its grades

during the 2020–2021 assessment year (Hanna, 2022). Comparatively, in California, interim school-based assessments (e.g. iReady and STAR) showed similar declines across grades levels and student groups in both reading and mathematics between 2019 and the winter of 2021 compared to levels of growth scores in the years prior to 2019 (Pier et al., 2021). This analysis further noted students had fallen behind 2.6 months in English language arts (ELA) and 2.5 months in math compared to the years prior to 2019. Taken together, students' academic progress has been slowed over the last two academic years. Students have not been progressing as they had been prior to 2020, and results on national, state, and school-based assessments demonstrate there should be cause for concern among school-based leaders.

**Potential Causes of Declining Results**

One possible cause of the declines on national, state and school-based assessments could be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic (Betthäuser et al., 2022; Hammerstein et al., 2021). Beginning in March of 2020, some states closed schools as one method to keep children safe from the spread of COVID-19. States differed in their reopening timelines, with some states reopening schools sooner than others. However, some research illustrated mixed results between when states reopened and student test results (Mervosh & Wu, 2022). For example, states like Texas, which "reopened" sooner than other states, remained steady on its reading performance scores, but declined in math performance (Mervosh & Wu, 2022). At the same time, Los Angeles public schools remained closed longer than most other public schools in the nation but showed some gains in eighth grade reading. Additionally, achievement gaps widened between students

performing at the bottom 25th percentile and those at the top of their class (Mervosh & Wu, 2022). Conversely, other research indicated strong connections between in-person learning and state assessment results, with results decreasing less if schools returned to in-person learning sooner (Halloran et al., 2021). Given the significant disruption to student learning, researchers have documented the potential impact of that decision on student academic performance (Betthäuser et al., 2022; Hammerstein et al., 2021; Thorn & Vincent-Lancrin, 2021). Additionally, the impact of the COVID-19 response from schools was most significant in high-poverty schools (Kuhfeld, Lewis, et al., 2022), with the most vulnerable students being impacted the most by school closures and transitions to online and remote learning (Middleton, 2020). Overall, student assessment scores in states had begun to decline for school districts during the years of 2019–2021, a decline which could be partially attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the teaching and learning strategies used by schools during remote instruction.

Inside our nation's schools during the pandemic, schools transitioned to multiple teaching methods to reach students who were learning from home. Schools began to use online tools such as Canvas, Google Classroom, Schoology, and Microsoft Teams as methods to instruct students. Some teachers worked less hours, spent less time teaching new material (especially in high-poverty schools), reported decreased student engagement, and saw higher rates of truancy (Herold & Kurtz, 2020) during this time period. Additionally, instructional practices utilized by teachers varied with some reducing instruction, practice and assessment as well as decreased instructional time compared to when students learned in person (Hamilton et al., 2020; Wyse et al., 2020).

In the same fashion, teachers also reported struggling to get students to engage with coursework, a lack of professional development to deliver instruction online, and difficulty getting students to collaborate with one another (Leech et al., 2020). To sum up, instruction inside schools during the COVID-19 pandemic was challenging and uneven, but was one of the few ways that schools and teachers could offer instruction given the limited time they had to transition from in-person to remote teaching.

Also worthy to note, school-based leaders reported shifts in their leadership behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Principals needed to deal with the pressures of district COVID-19 protocols, added pressures from political disagreements over masking and social distancing, and an increased mental health crisis facing the nation's students and teachers (Grooms & Childs, 2021). Additionally, many principals adjusted how they implemented school policies during the pandemic. This resulted in instances of principal agency and prioritized decision-making about the best method to educate their students (Grooms & Childs, 2021). Furthermore, school principals faced increased stress levels associated with attempts to balance the traditional responsibilities of following state and district procedures, monitoring teaching and learning (i.e., teacher supervision), engaging with parents and other stakeholders, while at the same time managing the health and safety protocols related to the district's pandemic response (Reid, 2022).

In January of 2024 the Education Recovery Scorecard was released which examined results from state assessment scores across 30 states as well as comparisons between NAEP results before and in the two years after most schools returned to in-person instruction (Fahle et al., 2024). Results from this study indicated many states did

make some improvements from the spring of 2022 compared to the spring of 2023, and most states have shown some level of recovery, but remain below pre-pandemic levels with wider discrepancy between wealthy and poorer districts.

> Although U.S. students made historically large gains in achievement last year, average achievement in most states remains behind 2019 levels. Moreover, the recovery so far has not closed the achievement gaps which widened during the pandemic. In fact, in many states, the recovery during 2022-23 was being led by wealthier districts, meaning that the achievement gaps are getting even wider. Thus, even in the few states where average achievement has returned to pre-pandemic levels, students in lower income districts remained further behind in 2023 than they were in 2019. (p. 20)

As a result, schools have made some improvements towards returning to pre-pandemic levels. However, there is much more work that needs to be done by individuals states and school districts to assure students receive high quality instruction. One method to assist schools in trying to continue to recover could be a focused attention on teacher quality and assuring all teachers are preparing students for success.

Consequently, the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on student academic progress. In total, the pandemic onset and its impact on education could not have been predicted. Nonetheless, schools are now faced with a difficult task. Now that all schools have returned to in-person learning, and have demonstrated some recovery in the first few years after the pandemic, how can schools return to pre-pandemic procedures associated with improving teaching and learning?

## A Potential Looming Crisis

On top of the return to in-person instruction after the pandemic and efforts to regain learning loss that occurred during the pandemic, another crisis could face school leaders going forward. One looming crisis for educational leaders is the potential lack of

certified and qualified teachers working in classrooms. Fuller (2022) conducted a comprehensive analysis of potential teacher shortages in the state of Pennsylvania and concluded that the number of in-state teacher certifications declined by over 67% from 15,031 certifications awarded in 2010–2011 to 5,440 teacher certifications awarded in the 2020–2021 school year. Furthermore, he noted that the number of teachers working in classrooms with emergency certifications across Pennsylvania has significantly increased from 896 in 2011–2012 to 5,958 in 2020–2021. Fuller's findings also illustrated that middle schools that served the highest percentage of students of living in poverty had teachers with less experience than those in more affluent districts. A similar finding was found by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) was found a few years earlier. These two researchers concluded that two-thirds of teachers that leave the profession leave for reasons other than retirement. Furthermore, they noted that the fields of math, science, special education and English language development are some of the highest need areas. Additional research has also indicated that principals play a role in teacher retention. Ingersoll (2001) mentioned student discipline, inadequate support from school administration, and to a lesser extent low salaries as reasons teachers decided to leave the profession. He surmises that improving teacher recruitment programs alone cannot solve these potential problems facing educators, and instead a focus on school leadership practices as a potential solution to keeping and retaining teachers is needed. Castro (2023) also noted the potential impact of the teacher shortage on principal leadership. Specifically, he noted in his study of school principals that teacher shortages impacted the

principal's instructional management, organizational management, and internal relation behaviors (interactions with teachers and staff).

As a result of a potential teacher shortage, it might be important for principals to be able to identify instances where teachers might be underperforming and to develop strategies to encourage growth. Correspondingly, it could be important for school leaders to be able to identify and overcome potential barriers that could be in their way as they attempt to address teacher quality and specifically instances of teachers underperforming. School leaders may have a difficult future ahead of them due to the lack of certified teachers, and it could be very valuable for principals to be able to understand characteristics of underperformance as a potential school improvement strategy. It may not be an effective strategy for school leaders to simply remove ineffective teachers, due in large part to the lack of qualified candidates waiting to replace them. In general, the teacher shortage is placing more teachers with emergency certifications into classrooms and could potentially impact the school principal who may need to provide more coaching, professional development, and support to those individuals due to their lack of formal teacher preparation in post-secondary schooling. Additionally, these individuals could require more formal and informal monitoring using the supervision and evaluation process and may take away time from the principal's ability to address underperformance across more experienced classroom teachers. Also worthy of note is the fact that with fewer college students majoring in education the potential of unfilled teacher vacancies could continue. This could place a strain on principals to effectively staff classrooms of

hard-to-fill certifications, causing them to spend potentially less time on supervising and evaluating the rest of their teaching staff.

In addition to a teacher shortage facing the state of Pennsylvania, there also appears to be a similar crisis facing school leadership. Recent research from Penn State University's Center for Education Evaluation & Policy Analysis concluded that the attrition rate for principals in the state of Pennsylvania has increased considerably from the 2020-2021 to the 2022-2023 school year. Specifically, the 15.4% attrition rate found in the 2022-2023 school year was the largest rate on record and the 4.2% increase was more than three times the next largest increase (Fuller, 2023). This study also noted principals who worked in schools that had more than 93.7% students of color had a principal attrition rate of 23.2%. Furthermore, the attrition rate for principals differed according to school locale and school type. For example, the highest attrition rate was found among high school principals (16.9%) and in rural and town remote locations (17.7%) (Fuller, 2023).

Taken together, there is a crisis facing the state of Pennsylvania. There appears to be a decreased supply of certified teachers coming out of college and universities across the state as well as an increase in the number of emergency certified teachers that are needed to fill this void. This could place additional strain on the school principal. This problem is further complicated due an increase in the number of principals choosing to leave the profession. As a result, the state of Pennsylvania is facing a decreased supply of teachers and an increase in the number of principals leaving the profession. Future

research is needed to understand the relationship between barriers principals may face and its potential impact on principal job satisfaction.

## Conclusion and Looking Ahead

If schools are going to return to pre-pandemic student performance levels and eliminate learning loss from the pandemic, then helping improve teacher quality could be one school improvement strategy for school-based leaders to use. One method to improve teacher quality could be to identify the characteristics, attitudes and behaviors of teachers who are teaching on the fringes of proficiency and may need improvement due to underperformance. Identifying and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of teachers and implementing effective supports is one way school-based leaders can improve teacher quality (Darling-Hammond, 2000). On top of this approach, it is also important to understand the barriers school-based leaders face when they attempt to address teacher quality. Principals and school-based leaders face multiple competing priorities (building and organizational management, lack of staffing, student discipline, paperwork, parent issues, and curriculum development) as well as other factors outside the evaluation process, all of which could potentially hinder the principal from identifying and supporting a teacher who needs to improve. It would be important to identify these barriers and any potential conflicts principals face to understand why the school leader may not be able to effectively support a teacher that needs to improve their craft.

This research attempts to fill a gap in the literature by providing insights from the perspective of school principals and their valuation of the different characteristics associated with teacher underperformance. Additionally, this research attempts to identify

if factors such as the demographics of the school principal, the demographics of the school, as well as the teaching experiences and administrative experiences of the principal play a role in the identification of underperforming teachers. Furthermore, it is also important to understand how principal demographics and school-based characteristics may impact the strategies principals use or the barriers they face as they address teacher underperformance. All schools strive to have effective teachers, and this research study is one attempt to assist school leaders to understand a few of the factors that are associated with teacher quality.

# CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

To advance K–12 education, researchers and policymakers have attempted to identify theories of teacher quality and the relationship between teacher quality and student academic performance. Some research has centered on the impact of national reform efforts like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTT) that address teacher quality through accountability measures. Others have centered their research on the role of the school principal and their connection to teacher quality, while still others have identified potential barriers that may hinder the work of the school principal to address teacher quality and performance. Each of these research efforts attempts to reinforce the belief that teachers and the quality of their performance inside the classroom can impact student achievement and are thus worthy of additional research.

## Theories of Teacher Quality

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) highlighted the mediocre performance of students in the United States and its potential impact on the overall global economy, that if left unchecked could have dire consequences for the nation. Mehta (2013) explained that since the release of that report in 1983 a new educational shift has been adopted in the United States that centers on several main points: educational success is the key to economic success for individuals and nations; American schools are failing and must be reformed; teachers and schools—rather than social factors, such as poverty—are responsible for academic outcomes; and educational success should be measured by tests. This new paradigm shift

suggests that teachers are the problem that cause schools to perform poorly due to their lack of knowledge, skill, and commitment. At the same time, teachers could offer the most promising solution because if teacher quality improves, it will improve some of the ails of schools (Cochran-Smith et al., 2017).

According to Cochran-Smith (2017), during the mid to late 1990s and well into the mid-2000s, policy debates about teacher quality revolved around two competing agendas, often referred to as the "professionalization agenda" and the "deregulation agenda." The professionalization agenda focused on increasing teacher certification requirements to assure all teachers have the experience and certification prior to beginning their teaching assignment. This agenda led to the push for national teaching standards and national board certification efforts. This agenda is also highlighted in the requirements under NCLB to necessitate "highly qualified" teachers in all the nation's schools. Furthermore, the deregulation agenda focused on creating alternative pathways to teacher certification through prior work experience or through the creation of programs like Teach for America. However,

> teacher education over the past ten years or so cannot be as neatly sorted according to whether they support a professionalization or a deregulation agenda and debates no longer focus primarily on teachers' qualifications/ characteristics or entry routes. Rather there has been a major shift in the policy rhetoric about teacher quality—from a clamor for highly qualified teachers" to a demand for "highly effective teachers." (Cochran-Smith et al., 2017 p. 446)

Early studies have claimed that the schools themselves yielded little influence on student academic performance outside a student's family background and social context (Coleman, 1966; Jencks et al., 1972). These early studies asserted that schools and

teachers themselves could not overcome some of the factors that students faced outside the school walls. Later research has assessed the connection between teacher certification, teacher experience and student performance (Goldhaber & Brewer, 1997, 2000; Neild et al., 2009). These findings indicated that having a college degree and full teaching certification could have an impact on student academic performance, but only if the college degree was subject-specific, with the biggest impact observed in secondary mathematics classrooms (Goldhaber & Brewer, 1997). Additionally, subject-specific certification in content areas other than mathematics did not yield significant findings (Goldhaber & Brewer, 1997, 2000). Therefore, the relationship between certification and student academic achievement seems to differ based upon the subject area taught by the teacher, with more pronounced effects at higher grade levels, and especially in the area of mathematics instruction. At the same time, third-grade elementary students with more experienced teachers exceeded national median test scores in both math and reading (Jepsen & Rivkin, 2002), and similar findings correlated teacher experience with student academic gains at the middle and high school levels (Greenwald et al., 1996). In total, teacher experience does seem to account for some observed differences in teacher quality and student academic performance, while certification efforts to address teacher quality do appear to impact student performance but mainly at the secondary mathematics level.

Others have analyzed class size and its impact on schools and the connection to teacher quality (Hanushek, 2003; Jepsen & Rivkin, 2002). These findings indicated class size may impact student achievement, but predominately at the lower elementary grades, and more so for lower-income students. However, some of the limitations of these studies

indicate they are unable to isolate variables outside only class-size to determine its impact. Teachers may select to work in higher-performing schools after gaining experience early in their careers in lower-performing schools. Additionally, parents choose where to live and send their children to school; therefore results comparing schools are difficult to isolate variables only associated with the classroom teacher due to a lack of random sampling of student placement.

Additionally, a recent body of research has attempted to address the impact of the race and gender of the teacher and the potential impact on student achievement (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010). Goldhaber and Hansen (2010) indicate that students perform better academically when they are taught by someone who is of a similar race as them. In total, some of these factors of the teacher or the classroom can impact student performance and can be indicators of teacher quality. However, some of these factors can be outside the control of the classroom teacher. Some inconsistencies are kindled by the various methods used to assess teacher effectiveness as well as the lack of adequate data (including adequate controls for student and family background) to effectively assess the impact of teacher characteristics on student performance. As a result, two trends emerge from these findings: (1) teachers differ substantially in their effectiveness; and (2) these differences in teacher effectiveness are significantly correlated with student achievement, but all the variables determining teacher quality are difficult to isolate (Phillips, 2010).

Secondly, a recent growing body of research has developed over the last several years due to national testing efforts that attempts to isolate the direct impact of a teacher on the group of students the teacher taught during a given school year. Value-Added

Measures (VAMs) identify teacher quality based upon a "growth or value-added score" for teachers that is connected to the growth of individual and subgroups of students from one year to the next on standardized tests. "Value-added models intend to estimate the unique contribution or 'value added' contribution of teachers on students' change in learning (net of prior achievement, background, school effects)" (Konstantopoulos, 2014, p. 8). A teacher is identified as "effective" if they demonstrate one year of growth from one year to the next. Some research outlines the value of using VAMs in determining teacher quality (Chetty et al., 2014a; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010a; Kane & Staiger, 2008). For example, in mathematics having a teacher at the 25$^{th}$ percentile of teacher quality as compared to the 75$^{th}$ percentile of the teacher quality distribution would mean a difference in learning gains of roughly 0.2 standard deviations in a single year. This would move a student at the middle of the achievement distribution to the 58$^{th}$ percentile (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010a). VAMs are viewed as more accurate measures of teacher effectiveness primarily because they take into account previous student performance and student background. Additionally, a one standard deviation improvement in teacher VAM in a single grade raises the probability of college attendance at age 20 by 0.82 percentage points, relative to a sample mean of 37% (Konstantopoulos, 2014). Improvements in teacher quality also raise the quality of the colleges that students attend, as measured by the average earnings of previous graduates of that college. Students who are assigned higher VAM teachers have steeper earnings trajectories in their 20s.

> At age 28, the oldest age at which we currently have a sufficiently large sample size to estimate earnings impacts, a one standard deviation increase in teacher quality in a single grade raises annual earnings by 1.3%. If the impact on earnings remains constant at 1.3% over the life cycle, students

> would gain approximately $39,000 on average in cumulative lifetime income from a one standard deviation improvement in teacher VAMs in a single grade. (Chetty et al., 2014b, p. 2634)

However, additional research has indicated that there is a great degree of variability among VAMs due to the lack of random assignment of students to schools, and the fact that there is no one method guaranteed to accurately capture true teacher effects in all contexts (Amrein-Beardsley & Holloway, 2019; Guarino et al., 2015). Additionally, some research has indicated that individual teacher effects (e.g., VAMs) account for roughly 1–14% of all effects on student achievement, as measured solely on large-scale standardized tests, while the remaining 86–99% of effects on student achievement are beyond the teacher (Amrein-Beardsley & Holloway, 2019).

The debate about teacher VAMs stems primarily from two questions. First, do the differences in test score gains across teachers measured by VAMs capture causal impacts of teachers or are they biased due to student sorting? Second, do teachers who raise test scores improve their students' outcomes in adulthood or are they simply better at teaching to the test? (Chetty et al., 2014b). Chetty (2014a) indicated that there is very little bias in attempting to understand student gains from a teacher from year to year. However, incorporating other measures of teacher quality—such as principal evaluations or information on teacher characteristics—may yield more precise forecasts of teachers' impacts on test scores.

In summary, VAMs attempt to isolate variables that are more under the direct control of the teacher as compared to certification requirements and teacher experience. It could be significant to be able to label and sort teachers according to their yearly growth

and VAM scores, but this may not be the true intent of this data. Additionally, there is still debate as to whether the variables isolated in VAMs directly impact the improvement or decline of student academic performance.

## The Importance of Teachers

The need for high-quality instruction is one method schools could use to assure that they provide quality education to all students. Teachers are the primary individuals delivering curriculum, assessments, programming, and support to students inside the classroom, and their quality is one important aspect that could impact student and school achievement.

The literature around the importance of high-quality instruction has been robust and has explained that teachers are one of the most important factors impacting student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1996, 2000; Hanushek, 2011; Mangiante & Silva, 2011). For example,

> a teacher one standard deviation above the mean effectiveness annually generates marginal gains of over $400,000 in present value of student future earnings with a class size of 20 and proportionately higher with larger class sizes. Alternatively, replacing the bottom 5–8% of teachers with average teachers could move the United States near the top of international math and science rankings with a present value of $100 trillion. (Hanushek, 2011, p. 466)

Additionally, some research demonstrates that teachers can produce more academic gains for students than other teachers. In essence, some teachers produce a full year of growth (1.0) while others only achieve 0.5 years of growth for students (Hanushek, 1992). Specifically, Rivkin et al. (2005) highlighted that the effects of a financially costly 10-student reduction in class size are smaller than the benefit of moving

a teacher one standard deviation up the teacher quality distribution, highlighting the importance of teacher effectiveness in the determination of school quality. This means that schools could reduce class sizes by 10 students but still not have as much of an impact on student achievement as if they hired a high-quality teacher. Goldhaber (2016) furthers this argument in an analysis of 10 empirical studies of teacher quality and student achievement. His analysis concluded that the median findings across 10 recent studies indicate than an effective teacher (one at the 85th percentile) produces additional learning gains for students of 0.14 standard deviations in math and 0.12 standard deviations in reading as compared to an average teacher (one at the 58$^{th}$ percentile).

In summary, teachers matter, and they matter quite a bit. The presence of a highly effective teacher that can move students academically forward is one method that can help improve school performance. Teachers that can move students more than one year academically forward are often identified as "highly effective" and can be the type of teacher many parents hope to find inside their child's classroom. One issue facing schools across the country is how to identify and address teachers that are not highly effective and are not moving students forward as much as is expected.

## Identification of Ineffective/Needs Improvement Teaching

Teacher effectiveness is an elusive concept to define considering the multitude of factors that go into teaching, the complexities of the job, and the factors outside the teacher's control that could impact their effectiveness and student performance (Stronge et al., 2011). Lewis (1999) noted that teacher quality is a complex phenomenon, in which there is little consensus on what it is or how to measure it. In fact, there is considerable

debate as to whether we should judge teacher effectiveness based on teacher inputs (e.g., qualifications), the teaching process (e.g., instructional practices), the product of teaching (e.g., effects on student learning), or a composite of these elements (Stronge et al., 2011).

The purpose of teacher evaluation is one area to focus on, along with its potential to impact teacher quality and performance. Donaldson and Papay (2015) indicate that accountability and teacher development are two primary, but separate, goals of teacher evaluation; they assert that the impact of accountability systems can either encourage growth of teachers or encourage them to resign from the profession. However, they also found that teachers need effective and constructive feedback from school-based administrators in order for evaluation to be effective. If teachers are "identified" as needing improvement, school-based leaders need to develop effective feedback and coaching to help teachers improve. This is a goal that could become more important due to the teacher shortage facing the country, as was mentioned previously. Additionally, Flores and Derringer (2017) noted in their work that principals believed that evaluation's main goal should be to promote the professional growth and development of all teachers. In this research, leading teacher professional growth was viewed by principals as their focus of evaluation efforts. Although principals often view evaluation as a primary method to improve instructional outcomes of teachers, there are some problems associated with the evaluation frameworks.

One problem related to the supervision and evaluation process is the way principals use their own agency when conducting evaluations. Principals can use agency when conducting evaluations to make the process more efficient and comprehensible to

both teachers and principals. This change made by principals often results in the process causing inflated ratings and instances where the process diverts from its original intent (Donaldson & Woulfin, 2018). Furthermore, some research indicated principals applied teacher evaluation policy to accomplish multiple goals, including the original intent of the formal evaluation policy, but also some goals that were unrelated and even contrary to the policy itself (Donaldson & Woulfin, 2018; Lewis et al., 2022). Additionally, many of the components of the domain rubrics used in one teacher evaluation system, the Danielson FFT framework, do not accurately reflect the evidence-based strategies used by special education teachers and place more emphasis on constructivist forms of educational teaching than on direct, explicit, or individualized instruction used by special education teachers. (Morris-Mathews et al., 2021) This could result in teachers demonstrating effective teaching, but the evaluation measure capturing inaccurate evidence during the evaluation because it relies on a more constructivist approach to teaching. These studies provide clues to the fact that the evaluation process itself may not identify teacher quality as accurately as it is designed to do.

Equally important, other researchers indicated that final evaluation scores given to teachers by principals often did not match the actual perception of the principal regarding the teacher's classroom performance, leading to the conclusion that some teachers receive higher ratings than the principal deemed they may have deserved (Kraft & Gilmour, 2017; Range et al., 2016; Weisberg et al., 2009). Additionally, the shift from supervision of teachers to the evaluation of teachers has led to surface-level evaluation practices that fail to address instructional quality and student learning (Toch & Rothman, 2008).

Furthermore, some principals described the result of lower evaluation scores on teachers and their impact on the relational trust between principal and teacher as a reason they gave teachers higher ratings than they may have deserved (Donaldson et al., 2018). As a result, due to the evaluation process being changed or altered under the guise of efficiency, a potential relationship breakdown of principal and teacher because of a rating, or the final score not matching the evidence gathered by the school evaluator, it can be difficult to determine and label teachers as effective or ineffective based on principal perceptions. However, principal supervision using walkthroughs and formal classroom observations often remains one of the primary factors (up to 50–70% in many cases) used in rating teachers for their final evaluation score (Donaldson & Papay, 2015).

Aside from final evaluation of teachers, principals supervise teachers throughout the school year, which can thus influence their perception of teachers' performance. It is during the supervision process, using both informal and formal classroom visits, that principals determine their perceptions of teacher performance and can shed some light on the identification of teacher ineffectiveness. Torff and Sessions (2005) found that the most frequent causes of teacher ineffectiveness according to principals were classroom-management skills, lesson-implementation skills, and rapport with students. Stronge et al. (2011) conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the factors of the teaching process that could impact student achievement on fourth and fifth grade math and reading assessments and found that students taught by bottom-quartile teachers could expect to score, on average, at the 21$^{st}$ percentile on the state's reading assessment, whereas students taught by the top-quartile teachers could expect to score at approximately the 54$^{th}$ percentile.

Similar results were also found on mathematics assessments with the students in the bottom-quartile teachers' classrooms, who scored, on average, at the 38th percentile; students in the top-quartile teachers' classrooms scored at the 70th percentile. The study further went on to attempt to determine the teacher behaviors that resulted in the academic gains and found that top-quartile teachers had fewer classroom disruptions, better classroom management skills, and better relationships with their students than did bottom-quartile teachers. This study was one of a small number that attempted to address specific behaviors of high-performing and low-performing teachers and how they differed. Stronge (2007) also found that effective teachers tended to ask a greater number of higher-level (e.g., analysis) questions and had fewer incidences of off-task behavior than ineffective teachers in their study of third-grade teachers.

In total, there are three primary factors that have been used to determine the ineffectiveness or effectiveness of a classroom teacher. The first is based upon teacher preparation, credentials, and certification. The second is based mainly on principal perceptions of teacher performance based upon classroom observations and informal walkthroughs of classrooms. The third factor is the use of student academic performance on assessments to determine a value-added (academic growth) score designed to determine the teacher's overall effectiveness. Combined, these factors are designed to identify and measure the overall effectiveness or ineffectiveness of classrooms teachers.

## Historical Overview of Teacher Evaluation Efforts and Results

As mentioned above, despite national efforts to improve teacher quality through accountability measures (in NCLB and RTT), results have shown that accountability

measures alone have not accomplished all these goals. Although there has been an emphasis on trying to hold schools and teachers accountable for student academic performance, the research on this topic has shown that it is difficult to substantiate the impact of such accountability measures. As Hanushek and Rivkin (2010b) state,

> The belief that the quality of teachers matters a great deal to the quality of education received by students has actually proven hard to substantiate, and the reasons for this difficulty are key to assessing the impacts of No Child Left Behind. (p. 33)

Specifically, the first decade after the passage of NCLB in the early 2000s saw sporadic attempts to improve teacher evaluation systems and that despite new accountability measures, the traditional evaluation system used in schools was inadequate (M. L. Donaldson & Papay, 2015; Toch & Rothman, 2008). Additionally, The New Teacher's Project *The Widget Effect* (Weisberg et al., 2009) highlighted the fact that most evaluations were rare and did not provide effective feedback to improve teaching performance, and fewer than 1% of teachers received ratings below satisfactory despite new accountability measures. Additionally, based on the Garrison Keillor fictitious town where "all children are above average," Tucker (1997) highlighted the "Lake Wobegon effect" where all teachers are deemed satisfactory despite efforts to remove barriers to teacher dismissal, and that many teachers may not be performing as well as expected but still were rated as satisfactory by school evaluators. This effect of all teachers being deemed as satisfactory was further revisited by researchers, who also found that despite new teacher evaluation accountability measures implemented as part of RTT, many teachers in states with new accountability measures still received satisfactory ratings

despite evidence that schools and districts were not performing as well as would be expected (Kraft & Gilmour, 2017; Mizelle, 2010). As Ho and Kane (2013) state,

> There is a growing consensus that teacher evaluation in the United States is fundamentally broken. Few would argue that a system that tells 98 percent of teachers they are "satisfactory" benefits anyone—including teachers. The nation's collective failure to invest in high-quality professional feedback to teachers is inconsistent with decades of research reporting large disparities in student learning gains in different teachers' classrooms (even within the same schools). The quality of instruction matters. And our schools pay too little attention to it. (p. 3)

Additional research on the implementation of the teacher evaluation process by school leaders has concluded that it is not having the intended consequences that it was designed to yield. Specifically, "the policy logic to change evaluations outweighs the empirical evidence of its impact. Basically, the policy need is sold to the public, but the evidence does not really support that it actually accomplishes the goal of improved teacher quality" (Hallinger et al., 2014, p. 22). There are also some unintended consequences from the new teacher evaluation policies. Principals have agency; principals' views about evaluations differ; feedback is infrequent and brief; principals only give feedback on pedagogy; and final meetings to discuss observations focus mainly on getting the teacher to the next level, not on really improving their current performance (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). Furthermore, principals do not really carry out evaluations with fidelity, and they often make changes based on their experience as a school principal (Lewis et al., 2022). Donaldson and Woulfin (2018) also found that principals exercised substantial discretion in implementing the new evaluation policy, especially when conducting classroom observations. Overall, they found that principals exercised a significant amount of discretion when implementing aspects of the evaluation system

with which they felt most comfortable. Additionally, principals reported their rationale behind these decisions were to make the evaluation policy more feasible and manageable for themselves and the teachers. Kim and Lowery (2021), in a case study analysis, found similar results in their study of an under-resourced school that was required to award a specific number of "ineffective" teacher ratings as part of their state's evaluation process, despite the principal's belief that the teachers did not deserve this rating. This resulted in the principal engaged in an ethical dilemma over following the evaluation process as it was written versus their personal beliefs over who deserved a specific rating. Furthermore, some research indicated principals exercise professional judgment by donning evaluation policy as a "mantle of agency" for working toward a host of aims sometimes aligned with and sometimes antithetical to stated policy (Lewis et al., 2022). In total, the evaluation process appears to be disjointed across the nation, and it is often implemented based upon the decisions of the school principal based upon their skillset and ability to implement the policy as it was intended.

## Historical Review of the Pennsylvania Teacher Evaluation Process

Teacher accountability and evaluations changes began in the state of Pennsylvania during President Barack Obama's RTT competition in 2009. This competition required individual states to compete for large sums of federal dollars that could be used to improve teaching and learning in the states that won the competition. Although Pennsylvania was a phase three finalist, it did not ultimately earn the full dollar amount for winners of the RTT competition. However, as part of the application process state

applicants who ultimately did not win the top prize were still required to adopt many of the requirements contained in the RTT application (Race to the Top Act, 2011).

One of the application requirements found in RTT was "improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance" (Race to the Top Act, 2011). As a result, because Pennsylvania elected to compete for these federal dollars, in 2013, the Pennsylvania General Assembly passed new legislation (Act 82 of 2012) addressing teacher effectiveness and accountability (Public School Code of 1949-Omnibus Amendments. Act 82 of June 30, 2012, 2012). The philosophy behind Pennsylvania's newly created evaluation process was heavily influenced by the work of Charlotte Danielson. Danielson's framework outlined the need for educators and administrators to develop a common language around teaching practices and formal definitions of the characteristics of "failing," "needs improvement," "proficient" or "distinguished" teacher behaviors. Danielson's (2007) book, *Enhancing Practice: A Framework for Teaching*, outlined descriptors of performance in each of four main domains: *Planning and Preparation*, *Classroom Environment*, *Instruction*, and *Professional Responsibility*.

Act 82, signed into law by the Pennsylvania General Assembly in 2014, contained specific criteria and weighting of a variety of measures to determine a teacher's final evaluation rating. Under Act 82, Observation and Practice by the school administrator accounted for 50% of a teacher's final evaluation score and was identified through formal observations of teachers (Public School Code of 1949-Omnibus Amendments. Act 82 of June 30, 2012, 2012). The additional 50% of the evaluation scores were divided among a Building Level Score (15%), Teacher Specific data (15%) from student performance on

state assessments which included value-added and proficiency measures in English Language Arts grades 3–8, Mathematics grades 3–8, Science grades 4 and 8, Algebra I, Literature, and Biology. The final 20% of the overall evaluation score was determined from Teacher Elective data. This data included student performance on Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) created by the classroom teacher. The compilation of all these data sources composed the final evaluation score of a classroom teacher.

Act 82 remained in effect from 2014–2020. During this time, there were numerous issues associated with implementation of Act 82. Some of these issues were the fact that building level scores did not consider the challenge schools faced when educating students who were years behind academically. Ed Fuller (2014) of Penn State University conducted a study and concluded that School Performance Profile (SPP) scores had a negative correlation to a school's percentage of students that were labeled Economically Disadvantaged. Although the system did allow for student growth as a measurement it did not go far enough to create a level playing field for teachers who taught in school systems where large numbers of students with high need and low socioeconomic status were educated (E. Fuller, 2014). Secondly, the Student Performance Measures (SLOs) were highly quantitative measures. A criticism of SLOs was that there were not enough opportunities to take a more qualitative approach to student performance. Teachers had to use national, local educational agency (LEA), or teacher-created tests to demonstrate growth and proficiency. Additionally, many principals felt the rubrics used by the Danielson framework were extremely cumbersome and did not effectively address the need for a more streamlined approach to teacher

evaluation. Furthermore, the rubrics did not address all the various types of teachers and their teaching responsibilities. For example, teachers of students with autism were evaluated using the same components and descriptors as teachers of advanced placement (AP) courses. In a joint paper released by three administrative groups, several additional issues were identified as problematic in the Act 82 legislation. (Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators et al., 2014). This document outlined many issues, such as mathematical calculations in the observation and practice section, making it difficult to address underperforming teachers. Also worth nothing in the six-page document were the six recommendations for changes to Act 82, which included revising the weighting of categories of observation and practice, reducing the ten-year look-back window that occurs when two "needs improvement" final ratings trigger an unsatisfactory evaluation, as well as the inclusion of a gross deficiency rating for marginal or incompetent employees. As a result, in April of 2020 the Pennsylvania state legislature enacted Act 13 of 2020. Many (but not all) of the issues addressed in the joint paper from the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators can be found in the new teacher evaluation legislation created by the state in 2020.

**Pennsylvania's Adoption of Act 13**

Act 13 of 2020 was signed into law by Governor Tom Wolf on March 27, 2020. Ironically, this law was signed into effect at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of the signing of this legislation, many of Pennsylvania's public schools were closed to in-person instruction due to the fear and unknowns surrounding COVID-19.

Act 13 attempted to correct some of the deficiencies found in the original Act 82 legislation. However, the overall philosophy and accountability measures outlined in Act 82 remained present. Act 13 eliminated several factors that were part of Act 82 (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021). For example, the following indicators were eliminated from the Building score of a teacher's evaluation: promotion, closing the achievement for all students (including historically underperforming students), and measurements for the number of advanced students on state assessments. Furthermore, Act 13 also created a "challenge multiplier" that was designed to provide a multiplier to a school's building level score based upon the number of economically disadvantaged students in the school. This multiplier would help to address the issue of students with higher needs that are often concentrated in specific schools or districts.

Act 13 also made some changes to the Observation and Practice weighting on a teacher's final evaluation. The overall weighting of observation and practice was increased from 50% to 70–100% of a teacher's evaluation depending on the tenure status of a teacher (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021). Act 13 also addressed non-tenured teachers who are considered "temporary professionals." Temporary professionals were defined as non-tenured teachers who are relatively new to the field; Act 13 created an evaluation structure that allowed for 100% of their evaluation to be based upon observation and practice. Tenured teachers also saw an increased weighting of Observation and Practice from 50% to 70%. This differentiated approach to teacher supervision and evaluation was a significant improvement over the previous legislation. In addition, Act 13 also reduced the weighting of teacher specific data—that is, statewide

assessment scores for growth and individualized education plan (IEP) progress—as well as a reduction to the weighting for LEA-selected measures.

Another significant change to the evaluation structure under Act 13 was the newly designed Student Performance Measures (SPM). SPMs had a more qualitative approach to student achievement data than the previous SLO measurement. Teachers would be allowed to design measurements that required less of a reliance on numerical measurements of progress. Teachers could create their definition of proficient or needing improvement based upon descriptors they created for their SPMs. This process included more formal meetings between the principal and teacher to discuss, modify or change their SPMs.

The final change in Act 13 addressed principal effectiveness and accountability. Under Act 13, principals and other school-based administrators would now be required to create individual performance goals. The inclusion of goals for principals and other school-based leaders made the process much more collaborative and meaningful. These goals would be designed at the start of the school year and would account for 20% of the administrator's final evaluation.

Teachers and administrators would continue to receive final ratings of "failing," "needs improvement," "proficient" or "distinguished." However, Act 13 also reduced the time period of the "look back window" of two "needs improvements" resulting in an unsatisfactory rating from 10 years to four years. Specifically, if a teacher received a "needs improvement" rating twice in a four-year period, the second "needs improvement" would result in an unsatisfactory evaluation triggering a Performance Improvement Plan.

This plan would be collaboratively designed between the principal and teacher to specifically address areas of concern. Although this process was also included in Act 82, the period was 10 years instead of four.

Beginning in the 2021–2022 school year, Act 13 would become the evaluation system for evaluating teachers across the state of Pennsylvania. To begin this process, the Department of Education created three different one-and-a-half to two-hour pre-recorded webinars on each component of Act 13 to train the state's administrators on this new evaluation program. One of the problems with the webinar approach was that these webinars were not nearly enough professional development for building-based administrators. However, due to the law being mandated to begin in 2021–2022 and the COVID-19 pandemic impacting the country, there were limited options available to the Department of Education. So, with the knowledge of three two-hour webinars, Act 13 became the evaluation standard for all educators in Pennsylvania.

## Impact of Principals

The research on the impact of the school principal has also yielded some insight into how having an effective school leader in the school can impact many different aspects of the school. Grissom et al. conducted a robust analysis of empirical studies with large sample sizes related to principal impact in their comprehensive report released in 2021. In their study, they analyzed six large-sample empirical studies related to student achievement and the school principal (Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin 2012; Grissom, Kalogrides, and Loeb 2015; Chiang, Lipscomb, and Gill 2016; Laing et al. 2016; Dhuey and Smith 2018; and Bartanen 2020). Grissom's (2021) analysis of these articles

indicated that the magnitude of principal effects suggests that replacing a principal at the 25th percentile with one at the 75th percentile of effectiveness (an above-average principal) would move a student's math performance about 7 percentile points, from the 50th to the 57th percentile. For reading, the change would be from the 50th to the 55th percentile. In terms of months of growth, these impacts equate to roughly 2.9 months of learning in math and 2.7 months in reading in the standard nine-month school year. This result is similar to the impact of a classroom teacher as mentioned above (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010a). In sum, the school principal may have as much impact as a classroom teacher on student achievement" (Grissom et al., 2021, p.40).

Aside from those mentioned by Grissom (2021), additional empirical studies found similar results but with smaller sample sizes related to principal impact on teacher working conditions and retention. Branch et al. (2012) found that patterns of teacher exit related to principal quality exist. They noted that teachers do not elect to quit or transfer out of a school in buildings run by highly effective principals. Additionally, they found that the teacher transition rate is highest in schools with the least effective principals, regardless of the rate of school poverty, and that the rate of departure to other districts tends to be much higher in schools led by ineffective principals and least in schools run by the most effective principals. Burkhauser (2017) also found that the principal matters when it comes to a teacher's perception of their work environment. For example, the estimated effect of increasing principal quality by one adjusted standard deviation in perceptions of teacher time use has the equivalent estimated effect of a decrease in seven students per teacher or a movement to a pupil/teacher ratio of 8-to-1 in the average

classroom. This means that teachers will work harder for principals they perceive to be strong educational leaders. Others revealed that instructional and transformational leadership are jointly important for improving student outcomes. Teachers were more likely to try differentiated instructional practices in schools with strong instructional leadership (Goddard et al., 2010). Still others determined the importance of trust in the principal and a well-developed professional community of inquiry as connected to math achievement and suggest that relationships between teacher and principal impact student achievement (Seashore et al., 2010).

Aside from the impact of the school principal on individual schools, the schools and teachers may also have an impact on school principals. Principal job satisfaction is one potential area where research may be needed identify the impact of the work hours, the impact of increased policy demands placed upon principals and its potential impact on the job satisfaction of school principals. Wang and Pollock (2018) identified lack of time to evaluate teachers, teacher union issues and a pressure to constantly adapt to new programs and policies as being negatively related to principal job satisfaction. Additionally, they found that opportunities for professional development for school principals positively impacted principal job satisfaction. Reid and Creed (2023) found that principals often worked outside traditional school hours to complete evaluation paperwork and other administrative tasks that were not completed during traditional school hours. This additional time to work outside school hours also impacted principal future employment choices and job satisfaction. Liu and Bellibas (2018) further concluded that principal job satisfaction was strongly impacted by a school's positive

social interactions, safety, autonomy for staffing, school management type and funding resources.

In total, there are a multitude of factors that could contribute to principal job satisfaction. Due to the large principal attrition rate found in the state of Pennsylvania and discussed previously. Future research is needed to understand variables related to principal job satisfaction and how school district leaders can understand the factors that impact job satisfaction to identify if school policies can be adopted or modified to assure the individuals leading schools and fully supported and provided with the resources to be effective leaders.

## Barriers for Principals' Identification of Teacher Performance

There are identified barriers that can impede the principal's efforts to identify ineffective teachers. Furthermore, it appears that principals often appear reluctant to remove ineffective teachers (Range et al., 2012; Weisberg et al., 2009), cite ineffective teachers as a significant problem in their schools (Menuey, 2005; Platt, 2008), and often cite barriers for their removal (Lavigne & Chamberlain, 2017; Menuey, 2005; Painter, 2000; Range et al., 2012).

### Time Constraints

Specifically, Menuey (2005) indicated that the strongest barriers were, in rank order: protection of employee by professional association (e.g., National Education Association (NEA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT)), legal and other expenses, difficulty providing needed documentation, required administrative time, unclear definition of incompetence, and lack of resolve or strength of character by principal.

Lavigne and Chamberlain (2017) indicated that time to conduct evaluations was the number one barrier for principals related to identifying and addressing ineffective teacher quality, but they also found that principals saw the importance of evaluation conversations because they resulted in quality conversations between teacher and principal. Their research indicated that principals on average spent 7.78 hours on a single teacher evaluation process from start to finish. This work also identified that principals felt this time constraint caused them to work longer hours and delegate important responsibilities to others to conduct evaluations. Painter (2000) furthered this argument by noting that 57% of the principals surveyed in their research indicated time served as a significant barrier for school principals.

**Bureaucratic Hurdles**

Teachers who have earned tenure within a state often have different rights associated with their evaluation. For example, in the state of Pennsylvania, 100% of a non-tenured teacher's final evaluation score is determined solely by observation of the school principal (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021). However, tenured teachers have other data sources (SPMs, SPP scores, VAMs) that can account for 50% of their final evaluation score. These growth or proficiency scores can inflate final evaluation scores of teachers and can serve as a barrier for principals because these scores can reduce the impact of the principal's documentation (Conrad & Hackmann, 2022). Additional research (Menuey, 2005; Painter, 2000; Range et al., 2012) has indicated that teacher collective bargaining units often serve as protectors of under-performing teachers and as the top barrier for principals to address teacher performance.

**The Supervision and Evaluation Procedures**

Others have also identified challenges and unintended consequences from principals related to identifying teachers that need to improve. Kraft and Gilmore (2016) noted several unintended consequences that can be identified as potential barriers from principal evaluations of teachers. Specifically, principals' views on the purpose of evaluations differed, resulting in the evaluation process being used in different ways. The expanded role of the principal was also noted, which caused evaluation conversations to be infrequent and brief with their focus. Another key point was that principals gave feedback outside their area of expertise, resulting in feedback focusing on pedagogy rather than content-specific feedback. Still another challenge was that principals had limited training on the evaluation process, resulting in conversations that focused on rating and positive reinforcement rather than feedback on the performance of the teacher. Jacob and Lefgren (2008) demonstrate that principals can accurately identify the top and bottom 10–20% of teachers but struggle to differentiate between teachers in the middle 60–80% percent of effectiveness, suggesting limitations on such ratings for providing teachers with precise feedback, especially those just below proficient performance. Others have also supported this finding, noting that principals can identify and often document high- and low-performing teacher behaviors, but still award teachers with final ratings of satisfactory performance, despite their own collection of data (Ho & Kane, 2013; Kraft & Gilmour, 2017; Weisberg et al., 2009).

## Conclusion

In total, theories of teacher quality lay out an argument that teachers can impact student and school performance. The degree of their influence is an important factor for school leaders to consider as they attempt to improve schools. A critical factor related to identifying teacher quality is the quality of the school-based leader and their ability to identify teachers operating on the margins of proficiency. Their ability to provide feedback and effective strategies to coach and influence teachers to improve their practices could be a potential goal of school leaders and could also be a contributing factor to teacher, student, and school success. However, several barriers ranging from collective bargaining agreements protecting ineffective teachers, time associated with conducting evaluations, and the supervision process creating bureaucratic hurdles, have caused issues for school principals in addressing ineffective or marginal teachers. Additionally, without clear and compelling definitions of "needs improvement," "marginal," or "ineffective" teachers, school leaders could continue to promote and to allow teachers operating at this level to impact student and school performance. If schools need to improve, one potential area to address is how these barriers interplay and prevent school leaders from addressing teacher performance and improving teacher quality.

# CHAPTER 3

# RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for this study was a quantitative study of principal perceptions of teacher underperformance. Specifically, principals indicated through a survey response the characteristics, strategies, and barriers they faced as they attempted to address underperforming teachers inside the schools they lead. Responses were analyzed in both univariate and multivariate formats to identify if there was a relationship between principal and school demographics and the principal's valuation of the characteristics, strategies, or barriers of teacher underperformance. In addition, a profile of response rates by district was created to highlight the variety of responses from across the 29 geographic intermediate units and 499 school districts in the state of Pennsylvania. Additionally, a profile of the sample was also created to identify the demographics, and work experience of the sample of principals in this research study. Collectively, this methodology and design allowed for the sample to represent a full range of the types of schools, districts and principals leading schools in the state of Pennsylvania.

## Conceptual Framework

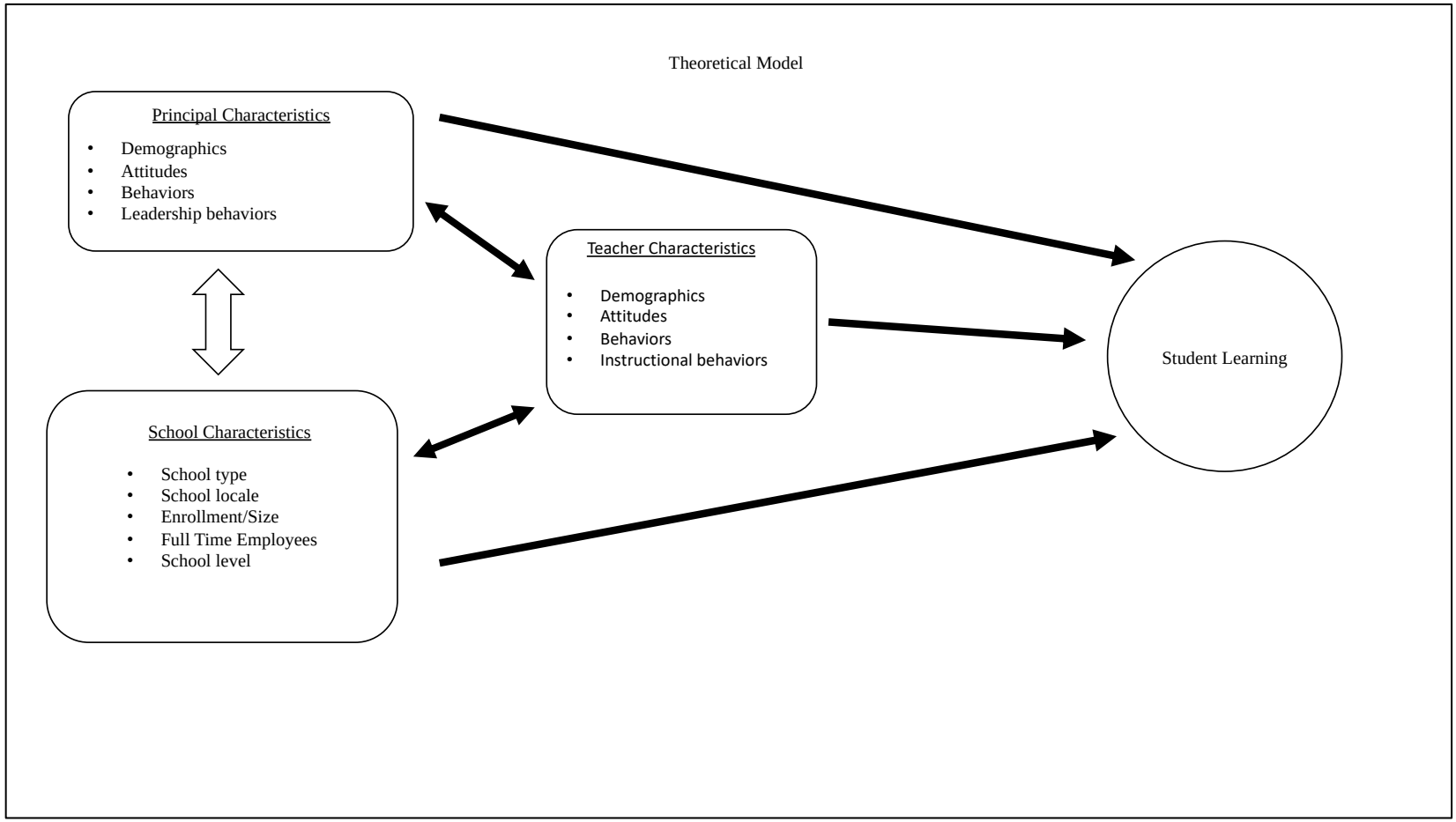
This research for this study is situated under the "leadership for learning" model developed by Hallinger (2011). In this model,

> leadership is influenced by leaders' personal characteristics such as their experience(s), values, beliefs, and knowledge. At the same time, educational leaders are influenced by barriers and opportunities in their local and more global contexts. Finally, leaders' influence on student outcomes is mediated, indirectly, through school-level processes and conditions. In short, leadership both influences and is influenced by school-level conditions. (Lavigne, 2020, p. 381)

The main task being researched in this study is the supervision and evaluation of teachers, which falls under Hallinger's (2011) work. Figure 3.1 is the theoretical model of this research.

**Figure 3.1**

*Theoretical Model*



## Research Design

This research study was a quantitative study that analyzed the perceptions of school-based leaders related to supervising underperforming teachers. “Quantitative research is rooted in the phenomenological paradigm which holds that reality is socially constructed through individual or collective definitions of the situation” (Firestone, 1987 p. 16). According to Goertzen (2017),

> In the most basic terms, quantitative research methods are concerned with collecting and analyzing data that is structured and can be represented numerically. One of the central goals is to build accurate and reliable measurements that allow for statistical analysis. (p. 12)

The overall purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of Pennsylvania principals related to supervising teachers they deemed were underperforming and in need of improvement. As the primary evaluators of teachers, school principals’ perceptions are important to understand regarding the attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics they associate with underperformance. Secondly, this study attempted to identify the valuation of principals related to strategies principals have used to encourage growth and development of “needs improvement” teachers. Third, this study attempted to identify the principal valuation of potential barriers they faced as they attempted to address an underperforming teacher.

## Research Questions

The following were the specific research questions for this study.

Research Question 1: What characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes do principals associate with teachers who they perceive are underperforming and need to improve?

Research Question 2: How do principal characteristics and their work experience impact how they perceive teachers who are underperforming and need improvement?

Research Question 3: What strategies have principals used with teachers they deem are underperforming and need improvement to encourage their growth and development?

Research Question 4: What barriers do principals face as they attempt to address teacher underperformance?

## Population and Sample

The population for this study was 2589 public school principals located in 499 school districts in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. A list of all public-school principals in Pennsylvania and their publicly available email addresses was obtained from K-12 Education Database. Based upon a response rate of 15.8%, the sample for this study included 410 principals from the state of Pennsylvania.

## Recruitment and Data Collection

Participants were recruited for this study through an email inquiry that was sent to all 2589 principals in the state of Pennsylvania. The email inquiry contained a survey link through Qualtrics. The email inquiry contained an overview of the research study as well as an informed consent form (see Appendix A).

In early July of 2023, the first email inquiry was sent to all 2589 Pennsylvania school principals listed in the database. Two weeks later, a follow-up email inquiry was sent. Approximately two weeks after the second email was sent, data collection was

closed for this study. All data collection for this study was concluded by the end of July 2023.

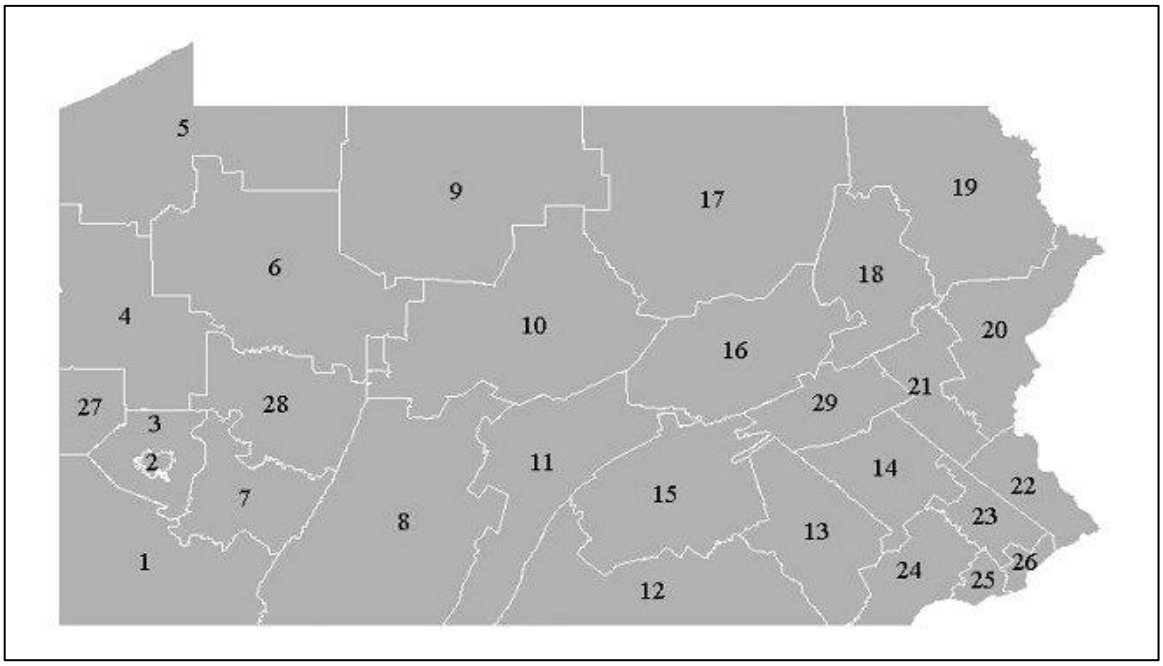
A total of 410 responses were received from the population of 2589 school principals, with a response rate of 15.8%. The sample included representation from 244 school districts out of a total of 499 located in Pennsylvania. This resulted in a 48.8% response rate from all school districts within the state. In addition, 10 participants responded to the survey who were principals of Vocational/Career and Technical Schools, which enroll students from multiple school districts; these schools were not included in school district totals and were coded as their own school district. For a list of participating school districts (including Vocational/Career and Technical Schools), the number of schools within the district, and the individual school district response rate, see Appendix B.

## Pennsylvania Intermediate Units

School districts in Pennsylvania are divided into regional Intermediate Units (IUs) based upon geographic location, and school district size/enrollment. The sample for this study contained responses from all 29 IUs in Pennsylvania (see Appendix C). Figure 3.2 is a map of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the numerical identifier for each of the 29 IUs located throughout the state. IUs are regional providers of resources, training, and technical support services for school districts. The largest responses came from IU #3, Allegheny IU (27, 6.6%). The smallest response rates occurred in IU #10, Central IU and IU #27, Beaver Valley IU (5, 1.2%). For a complete list of IU response rates, see Appendix C.

**Figure 3.2**

*Map of Pennsylvania and Corresponding Intermediate Unit Numbers*




*Note*. This map of Pennsylvania contains all the Intermediate Units (IU) across the state and their corresponding IU number. IUs are regionally grouped based predominately by county and size of the school district. In sparsely populated counties, multiple counties are grouped together to form the IU. From *Special Education Data Reporting IU Contact Information*, by Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d. (https://penndata.hbg.psu.edu/Home/IU-Contacts).

## Instrument

Portions of the survey questions were collected from previous research on principal and teacher perceptions of "needs improvement" and marginal teachers (Menuey, 2005; Range et al., 2016). Some of the survey questions used were taken from previous research and other questions were modified to reflect the language of supervision and evaluation guidelines in Pennsylvania. The final survey can be found in Appendix D.

The initial questions in the survey collected data associated with principal demographics, years of service as a classroom teacher, subjects taught, years of service as a principal, years of service as an assistant principal. Additional survey questions asked participants to identify school districts where the principal was employed, as well as if they had coursework and professional develop experiences related to teacher evaluation. Additional survey questions gathered data associated with the principal valuations of the characteristics they associated with a teacher that was underperforming and needed improvement. Survey items were presented to respondents and required participants to indicate which behaviors were most closely associated with teachers who they felt were underperforming and needed improvement. Additional survey questions asked principals to identify potential reasons they felt were the causes of teacher underperformance. Principals were also asked to rate how satisfied they were in their current position, and a summed scale was created to identify overall principal job satisfaction. Participants were also asked to provide information related to areas of professional development or training they may have received on addressing teacher quality. Additional data collected on the survey attempted to identify the perceived barriers that principals identified when they attempted to address teacher underperformance.

## School District Profile of the Sample

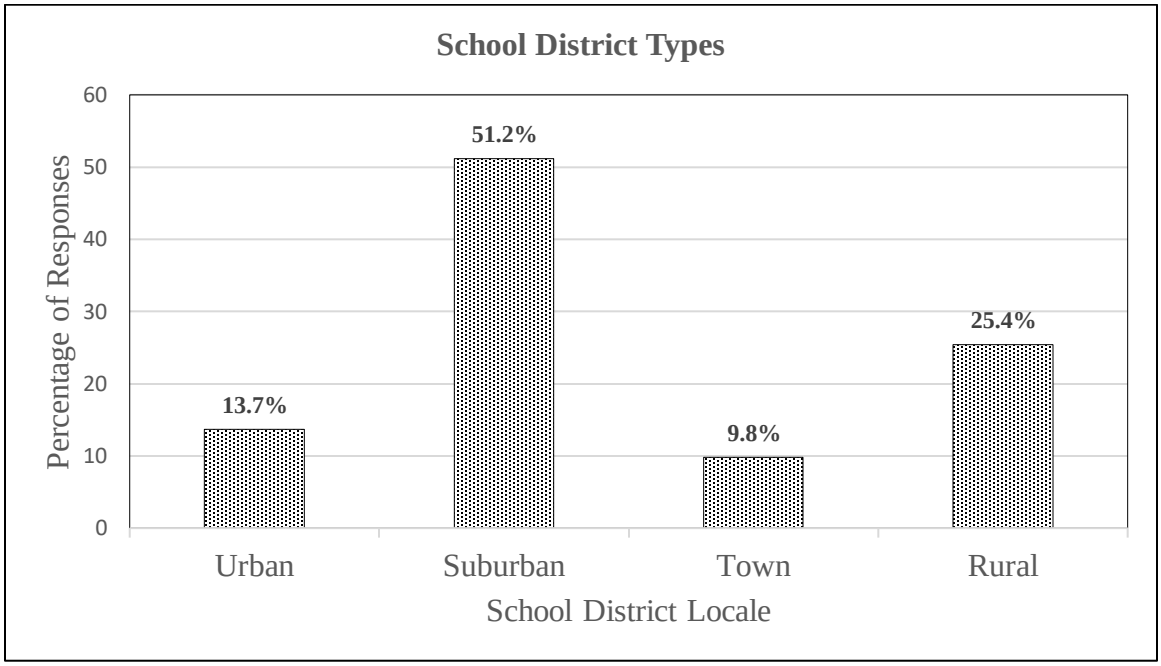
Four hundred and ten responses were received from the population of 2589 school principals in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The names of each school district represented along with each district's response rate can be found in Appendix B. Each school district and the number of schools within each district were used to develop a

district response percentage rate for each school district by dividing the number of responses received by the total number of schools within the district. Some of the smaller school districts within the sample (districts with 2–3 schools) resulted in higher response rate percentages due to a smaller number of schools within the district. For example, the Bellwood-Antis School District has three schools within the district, and all three principals responded to the survey, yielding a 100% response rate. In contrast, The School District of Philadelphia (the state's largest district) has 218 schools, and this study received 20 responses, resulting in a 9.2% response rate of all the district's principals.

School districts were also identified as urban, suburban, town, or rural according to the National Center for Educational Statistics Common Core of Data (NCES). Figure 3.3 represents the sample based upon NCES school identifier.

**Figure 3.3**

*School District Locale*



Over half of the sample responses (314, 76.6%) came from suburban and rural school districts. The sample also included a variety of responses from each of the different types of locales found throughout the state (see Figure 3.3).

Additionally, the NCES Common Core of Data further subdivides districts into different categories within each locale. Table 3.1 provides a representation of each of the responses and their subdivision within each locale.

**Table 3.1**

*School District Subdivision Locale*

| *District Type* | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Rural: Remote | 7 (1.7%) |
| Rural: Distant | 29 (7.1%) |
| Rural: Fringe | 68 (16.6%) |
| Town: Remote | 6 (1.5%) |
| Town: Distant | 24 (5.9%) |
| Town: Fringe | 10 (2.4%) |
| Suburb: Small | 14 (3.4%) |
| Suburb: Midsize | 17 (4.1%) |
| Suburb: Large | 179 (43.7%) |
| City: Small | 26 (6.3%) |
| City: Midsize | 3 (0.7%) |
| City: Large | 27 (6.6%) |
| Total | 410 (100%) |

Most of the responses to the survey came from large suburban school districts (179, 44%) and rural fringe districts (68, 16.6%). The smallest sampling came from midsized cities (3, 1%).

In addition to school locale, the survey also collected data to identify the different types of grade bands within each of the respondent's schools. Table 3.2 illustrates the type of schools and the grade bands found within each school. Elementary schools contained kindergarten through sixth grades. Middle Schools contained grades five or six through eighth grade, and high schools contained grades nine through 12. In addition to traditional grade bands listed above, some participants indicated non-traditional grade bands within their schools. These responses were coded into a different category (both middle and high school grades). Participants from these schools indicated in their responses that they contained traditional middle grades as well as traditional high school grades (seventh or eighth grade through $12^{th}$ grade) located within the same building. Most of the sample of principals who responded worked in elementary schools (213, 52%), and the other half was split among middle school (67, 16%), high school (87, 21%), and a combination of both middle and high school grades (43, 11%) in the same school.

**Table 3.2**

*School Types with Grade Bands*

| *Grade Bands* | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Elementary School | 213 (52%) |
| Middle School | 67 (16%) |
| High School | 87 (21%) |
| Both Middle and High School | 43 (11%) |
| Total | 410 (100%) |

## Profile of the Principals

Table 3.3 provides a crosstabulation of respondent by gender and ethnicity. Most of the sample of school principals were male (242, 59%). Also, most of the principals in the sample were white (379, 92%). When taken together, the largest category of participants was white and male (228, 56%). Conversely, few respondents (31, 8%) were minority (Hispanic, Black, non-white).

**Table 3.3**

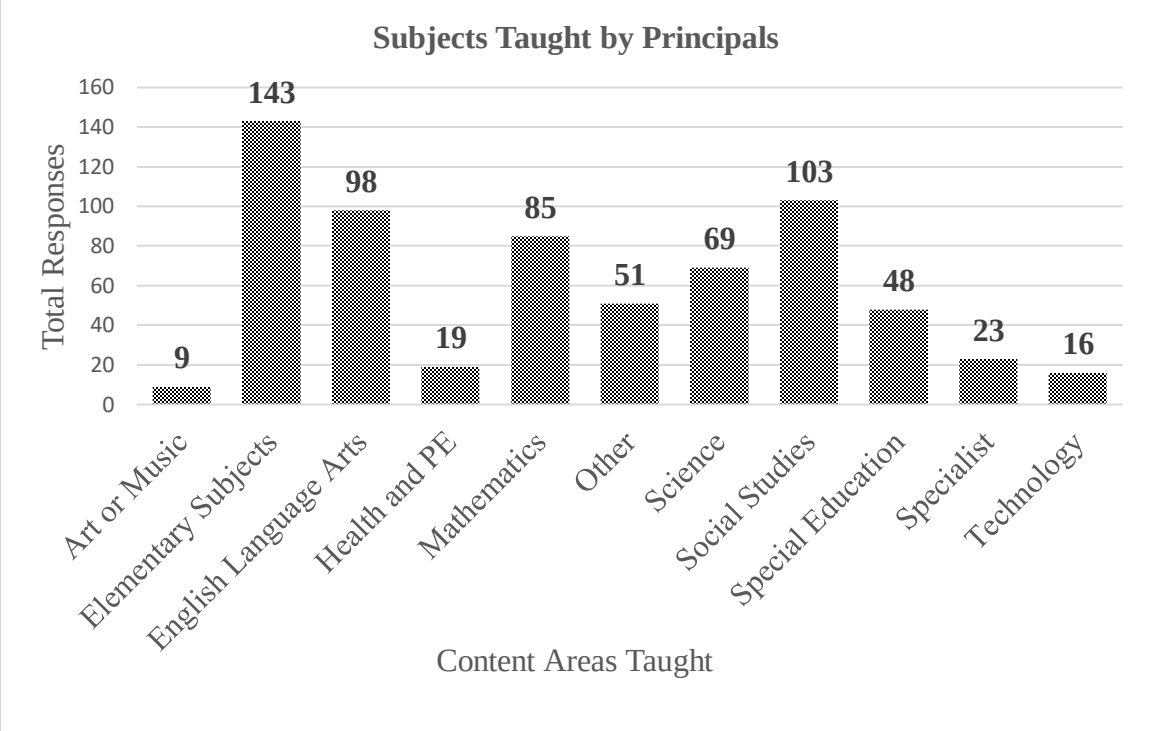
*Crosstabulation: Race and Gender*

| Gender | Race | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | White | Minority | Total |
| Male | 228 (55.6%) | 14 (3.4%) | 242 (59.0%) |
| Female | 151 (36.8%) | 17 (4.1%) | 168 (41.0%) |
| Total | 379 (92.4%) | 31 (7.5%) | 410 (100%) |

This study also collected data on the teaching and administrative experiences of the participants. Figure 3.4 represents the subject-matter teaching experiences of the principals in the sample. Most participants had classroom teaching experiences that included core academic subjects in self-contained elementary classrooms (143, 35%) or secondary Social Studies (103, 25%). Only a few participants had experiences in teaching special area classes such as Art (9, 2%), Technology (16, 4%), and Health and Physical Education (19, 5%).

**Figure 3.4**

*Subjects Taught by Participants*




Additionally, principals had a variety of years of teaching experience prior to becoming a school principal. Table 3.4 displays the years of teaching experience in this

sample. Most of our sample had between five to nine years (204, 49.8%) of classroom teaching experience prior to becoming a school principal. Also worthy of note, some participants had more than 15 years of teaching experience (61, 15%) or one to four years of classroom teaching experience (15, 4%) before they assumed the role of school principal. Participants with no teaching experience indicated they served in non-teaching roles such as school counselor prior to becoming a school principal. Many of the participants had between 5-14 years (329, 80.3%) of teaching experience.

**Table 3.4**

*Years of Teaching Experience by Principals*

| *Teaching Experience* | Frequency |
|---|---|
| 0 years | 5 (1.2%) |
| 1–4 years | 15 (3.7%) |
| 5–9 years | 204 (49.8%) |
| 10–14 years | 125 (30.5%) |
| 15 or more years | 61 (14.9%) |
| Total | 410 (100%) |

In addition to classroom teaching experience, most participants had experience as an assistant principal (291, 71%). Table 3.5 displays the years of experience as an assistant principal from our sample. Approximately (165, 40%) of the sample had between one to four years of administrative experience as an assistant principal before becoming a building principal. Interestingly, (119, 29%) of the sample had no experience as an assistant principal prior to becoming a school principal. Taken together, (284,

69.2%) of the sample had fewer than five years of experience as an assistant principal prior to assuming the role of school principal. Additionally, (21, 6%) had more than 10 years of experience as an assistant principal prior to assuming the role of principal.

**Table 3.5**

*Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal*

| *Years as an Assistant Principal* | Frequency |
|---|---|
| 0 years | 119 (29%) |
| 1–4 years | 165 (40.2%) |
| 5–9 years | 105 (25.6%) |
| 10–14 years | 18 (4.4%) |
| 15 or more years | 3 (0.7%) |
| Total | 410 (100.0%) |

Table 3.6 highlights respondents' years of experience serving as a school principal. The distribution of school principal experience was somewhat divided between those with fewer than 10 years of experience and those with more than 10 years of experience. Specifically, (254, 62%) of the participants had between one to nine years of principal experience, and (156, 38%) had 10 or more years of experience as a school principal.

**Table 3.6**

*Years of Experience as a School Principal*

| *Years as Principal* | Frequency |
|---|---|
| 1–4 years | 123 (30%) |
| 5–9 years | 131 (32%) |
| 10–14 years | 77 (19%) |
| 15 or more years | 79 (19%) |
| Total | 410 (100%) |

In conclusion, the sample included principals from a wide range of school districts, as well as from different regions across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The sample also included participants from school districts of various sizes and locations (urban, suburban, etc.). Additionally, the sample included different types of schools with various grade bands (elementary, middle, high school). The sample has also captured participants with a wide variety of years of teaching experience, different subjects taught, and their years of experience as an assistant principal and principal. Overall, this sample offered a wide representation of the characteristics of school administrators in Pennsylvania as well as the different types of schools and locations where they lead schools.

# CHAPTER 4

# RESULTS

The purpose of this research study was to understand the perceptions of Pennsylvania school principals as they addressed teacher performance. Specifically, this study focused on how principals identified underperforming teachers, strategies implemented with underperforming teachers to encourage improvement, and barriers principals faced as they attempted to address teacher performance. There were four research questions for this study. Each will be addressed in turn.

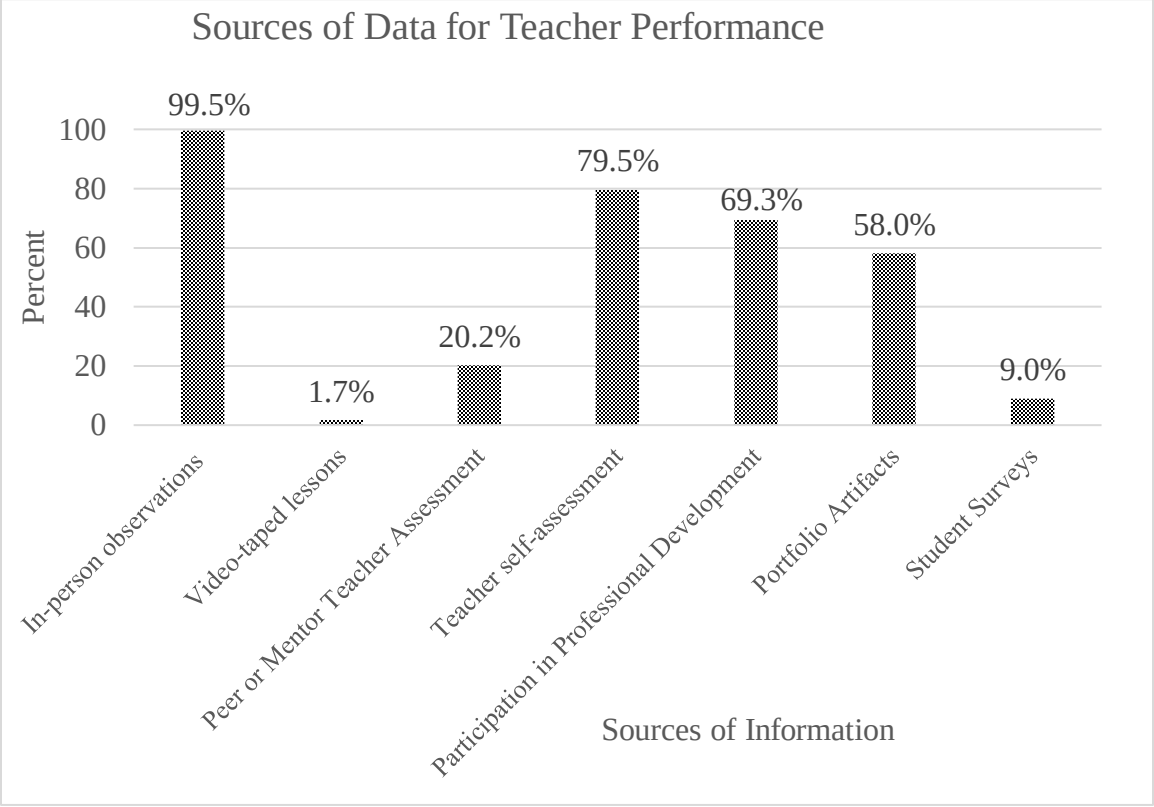
## Research Question 1: What characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes do principals associate with teachers who they perceive are underperforming and need to improve?

To answer Research Question 1, participants were presented in the survey with a series of questions related to attitudes, behaviors and characteristics associated with teacher underperformance (see Appendix D). Data was analyzed in univariate form collecting overall percentages from items presented in the survey. In the initial section of the survey, respondents were presented with seven data collection methods that could be used during teacher observations. Participants were asked to rate how frequently they used the different observation methods presented. In-person observations (408, 99.5%) were the most common method of observation used by principals. In Pennsylvania, the requirement of direct formal observation protocols for teachers is clearly outlined in Act 13 of 2020 legislation, which could explain their high frequency of use of in-person observations by almost all principals. Interesting to note, Act 13 of 2020 also requires that teachers participate in the evaluation process and requires teachers to self-assess their

performance as part of the formal observation process. However, only (326, 79.5%) of the principals chose teacher self-assessment as a source of information used in the evaluation process. Given the fact that teacher self-assessment is a requirement in Act 13 of 2020 (the legislation that provides guidelines and requirements for teacher evaluation in Pennsylvania), it was expected that more principals would have chosen self-assessment as a major source of evidence in the observation and evaluation process. This discrepancy could illustrate some potential principal agency and decision-making that differed slightly from the requirements outlined in Act 13 of 2020. Similar findings of principals changing or modifying the evaluation process were found in some previous research (M. L. Donaldson & Woulfin, 2018; J. M. Lewis et al., 2022). In addition, participants identified the use of video-taped lessons (7, 1.7%) as the least frequently used source of evidence.. See Figure 4.1 for further details.

**Figure 4.1**

*Sources of Information Collected by Principals*

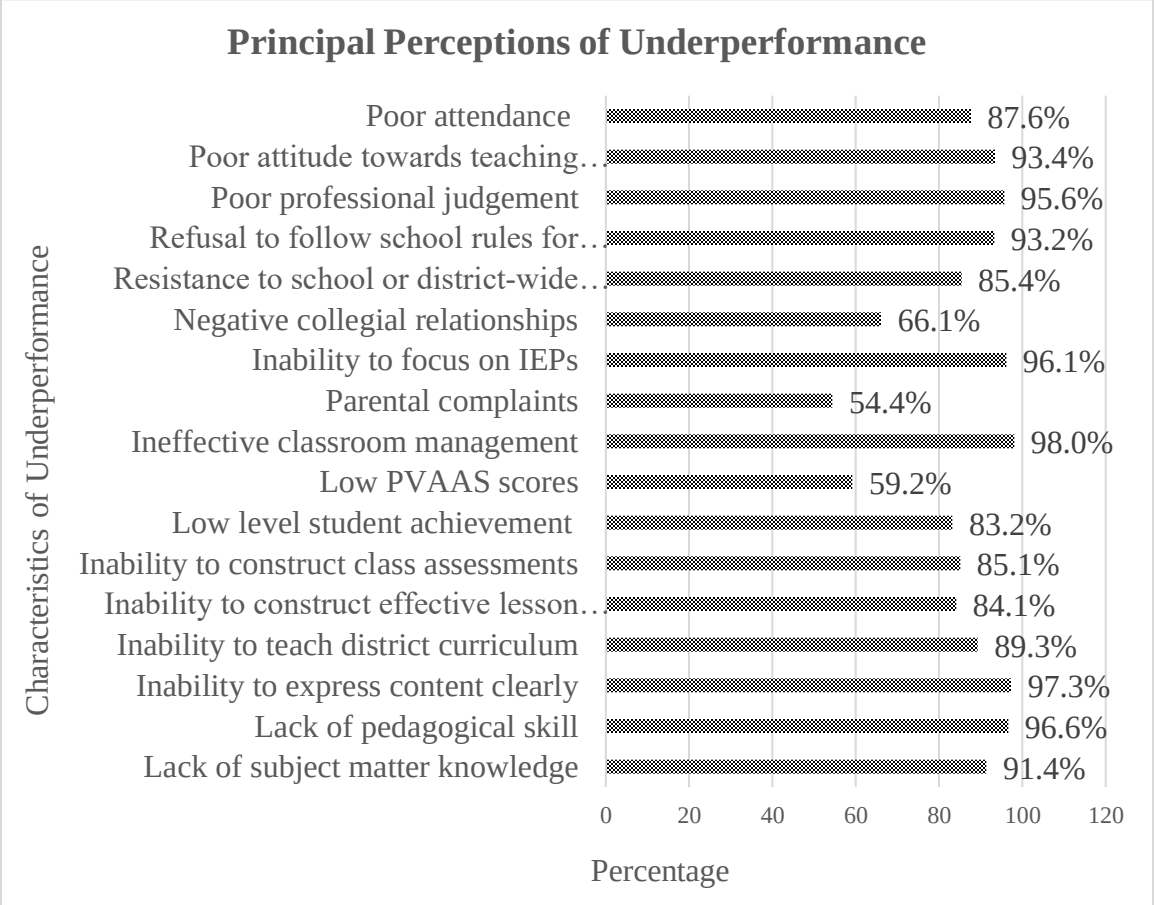



A section of the survey instrument contained 17 potential attributes associated with underperformance that came from previous research around teacher underperformance (Menuey, 2005), and other survey items were added to align with language found in Act 13 of 2020. Respondents were asked to indicate through a Likert scale (5= *very important* to 1= *very unimportant*) how important each item was in determining if a teacher was underperforming. Some responses were combined/collapsed (5= *very important* and 4= *important*) to determine if the item was viewed as an important indicator, characteristic, behavior, or attitude of an underperforming teacher.

Figure 4.2 illustrates the percentage of principals that valued the item as an important factor in the determination of teacher underperformance.

**Figure 4.2**

*Overall Principal Perceptions of Underperformance*



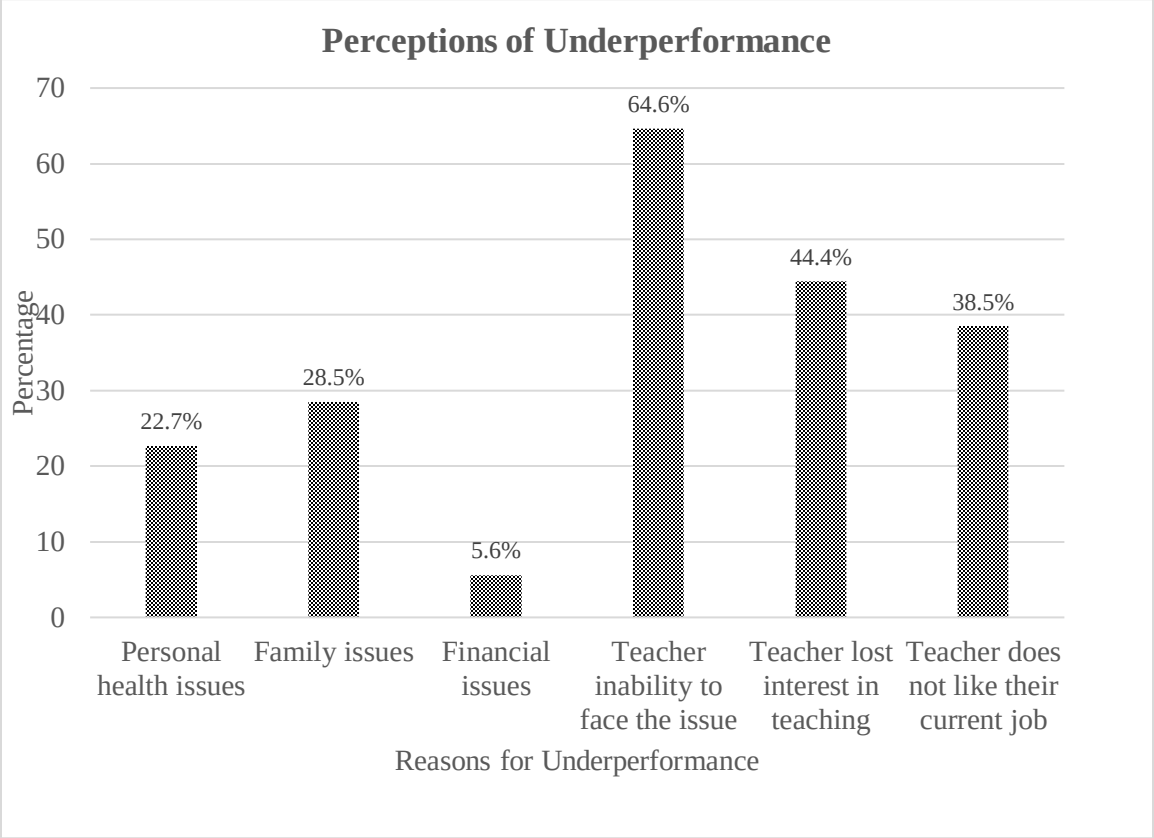

The most common characteristic associated with teacher underperformance identified by Pennsylvania principals in the study was ineffective classroom management skills (402, 98%), followed closely by the teacher's inability to express content clearly to students (399, 97.3%), the teacher's lack of pedagogical skill (396, 96.6%), and the teacher's inability to focus on a student's individualized educational plans (IEPs) (394,

96.1%). Conversely, parental complaints (223, 54.4%), low teacher value-added scores (PVASS) (244, 59.2%), and negative collegial relationships (271, 66.1%) were the least valued items of teacher underperformance according to participants.

To further answer Research Question 1 and understand the general perceptions of all the principals in the sample, questions also asked principals to identify potential reasons why they felt a teacher may be underperforming. Figure 4.3 displays the percentage of principals and the perception or reason they felt the teacher was underperforming. The inability of the teacher to "face the issue" (265, 64.5%) was the most common reason cited by principals in our sample for teacher underperformance. Additionally, principals also valued that underperforming teachers may have lost interest in teaching (182, 44.4%), and still others cited that underperforming teachers may have lost interest in their jobs (158, 38.5%) Conversely, personal financial (23, 5.6%), health (93, 22.7%) and family issues (117, 28.5%) were the least identified cause of underperformance.

**Figure 4.3**

*Potential Causes of Underperformance*




Taken together, Research Question 1 was designed to give global views of principals' perceptions of characteristics of teacher underperformance. Responses indicated that ineffective classroom management skills, inability to express content clearly, or lack of pedagogical skills were the most valued characteristics of underperformance. Principals also identified that the main reasons for teacher underperformance could be related to the teacher's inability to accurately assess and judge their own performance as well as the teacher losing interest or disliking their current job. In general, there were some clear indications that principals tended to value

characteristics of underperformance which they could directly observe inside the classroom (poor classroom management, inability to express content clearly). Items like low teacher PVAAS scores, parental complaints, and negative collegial relationships were not valued highly by participants in this study. It appears that principals strongly associate underperformance with poor classroom management and ineffective pedagogy.

### Research Question 2: How do principal characteristics and their work experience impact how they perceive teachers who are underperforming and need improvement?

To answer Research Question 2, survey participants were presented with survey questions that included demographic and work experience (see Appendix D). Participants identified their gender, race, years of experience as a teacher and principal, years of experience as an assistant principal, as well as subjects they taught as a classroom teacher and other general demographic information. In addition, participants identified the type of school (elementary, middle school or high school) they served as the principal. Responses were then tabulated in crosstabulations based upon various demographic information and the 17 characteristics of teacher underperformance outlined in Research Question 1. Data was analyzed in a multivariate format to look for relationships between multiple variables associated with demographics, work experience and characteristics of underperformance. Findings from the bivariate analysis are presented in the following sections.

### Gender and Characteristics of Underperformance

Analyzing responses by gender yielded some statistically significant findings. For example, Table 4.1 is a crosstabulation of gender by principal valuation of the importance

of teacher pedagogical knowledge. The relationship between gender and the importance of teacher pedagogy was statistically significant. On a percentage basis, women (120, 71.4%) were more apt to rate poor pedagogical skills as a very important characteristic of underperformance than were men (140, 57.9%). However, men also rated this characteristic as important (95, 39.3%).

**Table 4.1**

*Crosstabulation of Principal Valuation of the Importance of the Lack of Pedagogical Skills*

| Gender | Principal Valuation of Lack of Pedagogical Skills | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very important | Important | Somewhat important | Unimportant | Very unimportant | Total |
| Male | 140 (57.9%) | 95 (39.3%) | 7 (2.9%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 242 (100%) |
| Female | 120 (71.4%) | 41 (24.4%) | 6 (3.6%) | 1 (0.6%) | 0 (0%) | 168 (100%) |
| Total | 260 (63.4%) | 136 (33.2%) | 13 (3.2%) | 1(0.2%) | 0 (0%) | 410 (100) |

$\chi 2 = 11.061$, $\rho = .011$

In addition to differences by gender for teacher pedagogical skills, differences were also found by gender and the teacher's inability to express content clearly to students. Table 4.2 is a crosstabulation of the relationship between gender and the principal's valuation of the importance of the teacher's inability to express content clearly to students as a determinant of underperformance. The relationship between gender and the teacher's inability to express content was statistically significant. On a percentage basis, women (122, 72.6%) were more likely to rate this variable as very important than

men (132, 54.5%). However, men also rated this characteristic as important (101, 41.7%) compared to women (44, 26.2%).

**Table 4.2**

*Crosstabulation of Gender by Principal Valuation of the Teacher's Inability to Express Content Clearly*

| Gender | Principal Valuation of the Importance of Teacher's Inability to Express Content Clearly | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very important | Important | Somewhat important | Unimportant | Very unimportant | Total |
| Male | 132 (54.5%) | 101 (41.7%) | 9 (3.7%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 242 (100%) |
| Female | 122 (72.6%) | 44 (26.2%) | 2 (1.2%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 168 (100%) |
| Total | 254 (62.0%) | 145 (35.4%) | 11 (2.7%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 14.367$, $\rho = <.001$

Aside from statistically significant results by gender and pedagogical skill and delivery of content, statistically significant differences were also observed by gender and academic achievement of students. Table 4.3 is a crosstabulation by gender and principal valuation of the importance of low levels of academic achievement of students as a potential determining characteristic of teacher underperformance. Specifically, the relationship between gender and the importance of academic achievement by students in the teacher's classroom was statistically significant. On a percentage basis, women (73, 43.5%) were more apt to view low academic performance by students as a very important characteristic of underperformance compared to men (79, 32.6%). Men rated this variable as important or somewhat important (159, 65%) compared to women (95, 57%).

In total, women tended to indicate that underperforming teachers were teachers that lacked pedagogical skill, were unable to express content clearly to their students, and had low levels of academic achievement. Although men also tended to value these characteristics were important, women valued theese characteristics as very important when determining teacher underperformance.

**Table 4.3**

*Crosstabulation of Gender by Principal Valuation of the Importance of Low Levels of Student Academic Achievement*

| Gender | Principal Valuation of the Importance of Low Levels of Student Academic Achievement | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very important | Important | Somewhat important | Unimportant | Very unimportant | Total |
| Male | 79 (32.6%) | 116 (47.9%) | 43 (17.8%) | 4 (1.7%) | 0 (0%) | 242 (100%) |
| Female | 73 (43.5%) | 73 (43.5%) | 22 (13.1%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 168 (100%) |
| Total | 152 (37.1%) | 189 (46.1%) | 65 (15.9%) | 4 (1.0%) | 0 (0%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 7.699$, $\rho = .053$

## Race and Characteristics of Underperformance

When further answering Research Question 2, the race of school principals was also analyzed to determine if there were significant differences between white and minority principals and their valuation of the 17 characteristics of teacher underperformance presented to them in the survey. When analyzing all 17 characteristics of underperformance presented to participants, the only statistically significant result occurred between the race of the principal and the importance of parental complaints in the identification of an underperforming teacher. Table 4.4 is a crosstabulation of race

and parental complaints. On a percentage basis, minority principals (11, 31.4%) rated the variable of parental complaints as a very important factor in the determination of an underperforming teacher compared to non-minority principals (42, 11.2%). Also, it was interesting to note that 16 (4.5%) white principals rated parental complaints as unimportant or very unimportant compared to minority principals (0, 0%). Additionally, all other variables presented to participants did not yield statistically significant differences of race and the characteristics of underperformance.

**Table 4.4**

*Crosstabulation of Race by Principal Valuation of the Importance of Parental Complaints*

| Race | Principal Valuation of the Importance of Parental Complaints | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very important | Important | Somewhat important | Unimportant | Very Unimportant | Total |
| Non-minority | 42 (11.2%) | 161 (42.9%) | 155 (41.3%) | 15 (4.0%) | 2 (0.5%) | 375 (100%) |
| Minority | 11 (31.4%) | 9 (25.7%) | 15 (42.9%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 35 (100%) |
| Total | 53 (12.9%) | 170 (41.5%) | 170 (41.5%) | 15 (3.7%) | 2 (0.5%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 14.027$, $\rho = .007$

## School Type and Characteristics of Underperformance

To also answer Research Question 2, the responses from participants and the 17 characteristics of teacher underperformance presented to principals in the survey were further analyzed based on the type of school the principal led. Schools that principals worked in were categorized into elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and

one additional category of both middle and high school for those schools which contained some traditional middle school grades (i.e. grades 7-8) and high school grades. This type of grade band was most commonly found in rural or smaller school districts which may have elementary schools with grades kindergarten through six and a single secondary school with grades seven through 12.

Statistically significant differences were found between the type of school the principal led and their valuation of the importance of teacher subject matter knowledge as a characteristic of underperformance. The relationship between school type and the importance of a teacher's lack of subject matter knowledge and its contribution to labeling a teacher as underperforming was statistically significant. On a percentage basis, high school principals (51, 58.6%) rated a teacher's lack of subject matter knowledge as very important compared to principals at elementary schools (109, 51.2%), middle schools (35, 52.2%), and schools with both middle and high school grades (21, 48.8%). Results revealed that principals that worked in high schools seemed to value the importance of content knowledge as very important compared to principals who worked in lower grade bands (see Table 4.5). Although, the majority of school principals in all grade levels collectively appeared to indicate that a lack of subject matter knowledge was an indicator of underperformance. All other variables analyzed between school grade configurations/school type and characteristics of underperformance did not yield any statistically significant differences.

**Table 4.5**

*Crosstabulation of School Type by Principal Valuation of Lack of Subject Matter Knowledge*

| School Type | Principal Valuation of Lack of Subject Matter Knowledge | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very important | Important | Somewhat important | Unimportant | Very Unimportant | Total |
| Elementary | 109 (51.2%) | 82 (38.5%) | 21 (9.9%) | 1 (0.5%) | 0 (0%) | 213 (100%) |
| Middle | 35 (52.2%) | 25 (37.3%) | 7 (10.4%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 67 (100%) |
| High | 51 (58.6%) | 33 (37.9%) | 3 (3.4%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 87 (100%) |
| Middle and High | 21 (48.8%) | 19 (44.2%) | 1 (2.3%) | 2 (4.7%) | 0 (0%) | 43 (100%) |
| Total | 216 (52.7%) | 159 (38.8%) | 32 (7.8%) | 3 (0.7%) | 0 (0%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 17.055$, $\rho = <.048$

## Years of Teaching Experience by the Principal and Characteristics of Underperformance

Aside from the characteristics of gender, race, and type of school principals lead, survey responses were also analyzed according to the years of teaching experience principals had prior to becoming a school leader and their valuation of underperformance characteristics. The survey presented to principals asked participants to indicate the number of years of classroom teaching experience (0 years, 1–4 years, 5–9 years, 10–14 years, 15 or more years.) Participants with no classroom teaching experience often

indicated they had served as school counselors or other non-teaching roles inside the school prior to becoming a principal. Two variables related to teaching experience and underperformance yielded statistical significance.

First, the relationship between the years of teaching experience of the school principal and a teacher's lack of subject matter was statistically significant. Principals with 15 or more years of teaching experience (35, 57.4%) and 10–14 years (69, 55.2%) identified that a teacher's lack of subject matter knowledge was a very important characteristic of underperformance compared to principals with 1–4 years teaching experience (7, 46.7%) and 5–9 years (102, 50.0%). In summary, the more years of teaching experience principals had the more apt they appeared to value subject matter knowledge (see Table 4.6).

**Table 4.6**

*Crosstabulation of Principal Teaching Experience by Principal Valuation of Lack of Subject Matter Knowledge*

| Years of Teaching Experience | Principal Valuation of Lack of Subject Matter Knowledge | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very important | Important | Somewhat important | Unimportant | Very Unimportant | Total |
| 0 years | 3 (60.0%) | 1 (20.0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (20.0%) | 0 (0%) | 5 (100%) |
| 1–4 years | 7 (46.7%) | 8 (53.3%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 15 (100%) |
| 5–9 years | 102 (50.0%) | 85 (41.7%) | 17 (8.3%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 204 (100%) |
| 10–14 years | 69 (55.2%) | 44 (35.2%) | 10 (8.0%) | 2 (1.6%) | 0 (0%) | 125 (100%) |
| 15 or more years | 35 (57.4%) | 21 (34.4%) | 5 (8.2%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 61 (100%) |
| Total | 216 (52.7%) | 159 (38.8%) | 32 (7.8%) | 3 (0.7%) | 0 (0%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 33.620$, $\rho = <.001$

Additionally, principal teaching experience was also a statistically significant finding as it related to teachers following the district curriculum. Based upon participant responses, the teaching experiences of the school principal was statistically significant as it related to the teacher's inability to follow district curriculum as a characteristic of underperformance. On a percentage basis, principals with 5–9 years of teaching experience (96, 47.1%) rated the inability of a teacher to teach the district's curriculum as very important compared to principals with 10–14 years of teaching experience (49, 39.2%) and 15 or more years of classroom experience (24, 39.3%). See Table 4.7 for further details.

**Table 4.7**

*Crosstabulation of Principal Teaching Experience by Principal Valuation of the Inability to Follow the District Curriculum*

| Years of Teaching Experience | Principal Valuation of the Inability to Follow the District Curriculum | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very important | Important | Somewhat important | Unimportant | Very Unimportant | Total |
| 0 years | 0 (0%) | 2 (40.0%) | 2 (40.0%) | 1 (20.0%) | 0 (0%) | 5 (100%) |
| 1–4 years | 4 (26.7%) | 8 (53.3%) | 3 (20.0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 15 (100%) |
| 5–9 years | 96 (47.1%) | 88 (43.1%) | 19 (9.3%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (0.5%) | 204 (100%) |
| 10–14 years | 49 (39.2%) | 65 (52.0%) | 11 (8.8%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 125 (100%) |
| 15 or more years | 24 (39.3%) | 30 (49.2%) | 6 (9.8%) | 1 (1.6%) | 0 (0%) | 61 (100%) |
| Total | 173 (42.2%) | 193 (47.1%) | 41 (10.0%) | 2 (0.5%) | 1 (0.2%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 55.694$, $\rho = <.001$

## Years of Experience as a Principal and Characteristics of Underperformance

Coupled with the number of years of teaching experience of the school principal, data was also analyzed related to the number of years of experience as a school principal and its relationship with variables of teacher underperformance. Participants identified the number of years they had served as a school principal (0 years, 5–9 years, 10–14 years, 15 or more years.)

The relationship between a principal's years of experience as a principal and the inability of teachers to express content clearly as a characteristic of teacher

underperformance was statistically significant. On a percentage basis, principals with 15 or more years of experience (58, 73.4%) and 10–14 years of experience (52, 67.5%) rated a teacher's inability to express content clearly to students as very important compared to principals with less experience: 1–4 years (72, 58.5%) or 5–9 years (72, 55.0%) (see Table 4.8).

**Table 4.8**

*Crosstabulation of Years as a Principal by Principal Valuation of the Teacher's Inability to Express Content Clearly*

| Years of Experience as a Principal | Principal Valuation of the Teacher's Inability to Express Content Clearly | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very important | Important | Somewhat important | Unimportant | Very unimportant | Total |
| 1–4 years | 72 (58.5%) | 47 (38.2%) | 4 (3.3%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 123 (100%) |
| 5–9 years | 72 (55.0%) | 52 (39.7%) | 7 (5.3%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 131 (100%) |
| 10–14 years | 52 (67.5%) | 25 (32.5%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 77 (100%) |
| 15 or more years | 58 (73.4%) | 21 (26.6%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 79 (100%) |
| Total | 254 (62.0%) | 145 (35.4%) | 11 (2.7%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 14.000$, $\rho = <.030$

Additionally, principals with more experience as school principals tended to value the importance of teaching the district curriculum more than less experienced leaders. For example, the relationship between the years of administrative experience of a school principal and their perception of a teacher's inability to teach the district's curriculum as a

characteristic of underperformance was statistically significant. On a percentage basis, principals with more experience—15 or more years (40, 50.6%) and 10–14 years (40, 51.9%)—rated a teacher's inability to teach the district's curriculum as very important compared to principals with less experience—1–4 years (43, 35%) or 5–9 years (50, 38.2%) (see Table 4.9).

**Table 4.9**

*Crosstabulation of Years of Experience as a School Principal by Principal Valuation of the Inability to Follow the District Curriculum*

| Years of Experience as a Principal | Principal Valuation of the Inability to Follow the District Curriculum | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very important | Important | Somewhat important | Unimportant | Very unimportant | Total |
| 1–4 years | 43 (35.0%) | 61 (49.6%) | 19 (15.4%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 123 (100%) |
| 5–9 years | 50 (38.2%) | 70 (53.4%) | 11 (8.4%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 131 (100%) |
| 10–14 years | 40 (51.9%) | 28 (36.4%) | 8 (10.4%) | 1 (1.3%) | 0 (0%) | 77 (100%) |
| 15 or more years | 40 (50.6%) | 34 (43.0%) | 3 (3.8%) | 1 (1.3%) | 1 (1.3%) | 79 (100%) |
| Total | 173 (42.2%) | 193 (47.1%) | 41 (10.0%) | 2 (0.5%) | 1 (0.2%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 23.025$, $\rho = .028$

Research Question 2 focused on the demographics of school leaders and schools and how those characteristics could impact the principal's perception of teacher underperformance. Statistically significant findings were found between the gender of the

principal and the teacher's pedagogical skills, as well as the teacher's ability to express content clearly. The race and ethnicity of the school principal was also statistically significant, and findings indicated that race was solely related to the importance of parental complaints. In addition, where principals worked yielded statistically significant findings as well. For example, principals that tended to lead high schools placed a greater importance on content knowledge than principals who led schools with younger grades. Furthermore, experience as both a teacher and a school principal resulted in statistically significant findings. For example, principals with more experience as classroom teachers placed more importance on the teacher's knowledge of subject matter than principals with less classroom experience. Additionally, principals with less classroom teaching experience tended to value the importance of following the district curriculum more than principals with more classroom teaching experience. Finally, the years of experience as a school principal also resulted in statistically significant findings. Chiefly, principals with more administrative experience tended to place a higher emphasis on expressing content clearly and following the district curriculum than principals with less experience. Overall, findings in Research Question 2 indicate that the characteristics of the school principal may play a role in how school leaders determine the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of teachers who they may perceive to be underperforming.

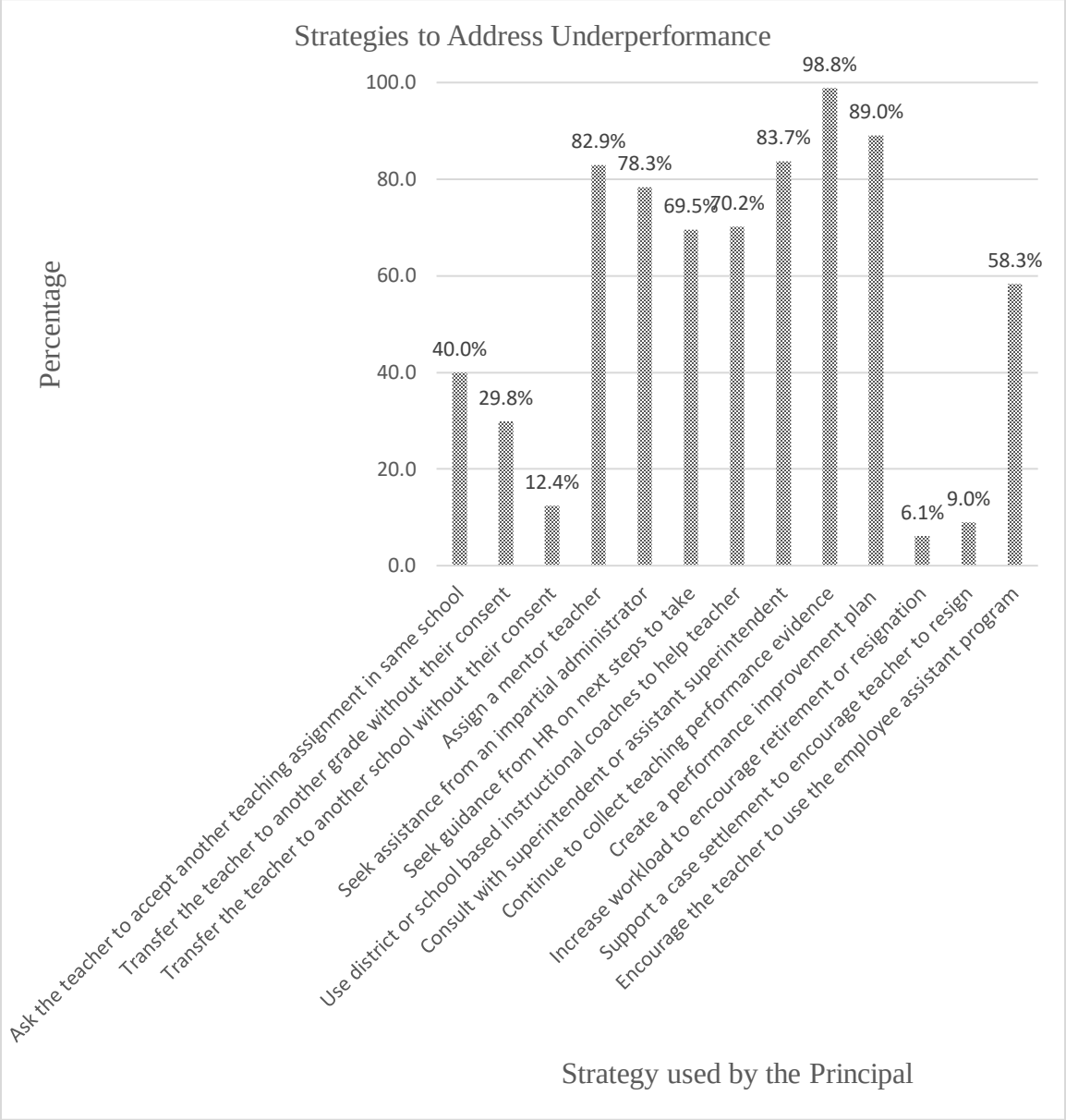
### Research Question 3: What strategies have principals used with teachers they deem are underperforming and need improvement to encourage their growth and development?

To answer Research Question 3, participants were presented with a list of potential strategies that could be implemented by the school principal to encourage

improvement of underperforming teachers. Strategies were identified from previous research (Menuey, 2005) and the researcher's administrative experiences and knowledge of Pennsylvania supervision and evaluation policies. Specifically, participants were asked to rate through a Likert scale (6= *Very often*, 5= *Often*, 4= *Sometimes*, 3= *Occasionally*, 2= *Rarely*, 1= *Never*, 0= *Does not apply/Cannot do*) how often they used the strategy with teachers they deemed to be underperforming. Responses of very often and often were collapsed/combined to calculate an overall percentage of the strategy's use by respondents. Results were tabulated to generate overall percentages of participants that used the strategy as well as crosstabulations of strategies by various variables used previously to answer Research Question 2 (e.g., gender, race, teaching and administrative experience etc.). Figure 4.4 illustrates the overall percentages of principals that used each strategy with teachers they deemed to be underperforming.

**Figure 4.4**

*Strategies Used to Address Teacher Underperformance*




The most common strategy principals valued to address underperformance was to continue to collect evidence of the teacher's performance (405, 98.8%). This strategy required the principal to continue to formally document evidence of teacher performance

throughout the school year. The participants in the study valued the importance of continued documentation of teaching performance as a major strategy to address underperformance. The second strategy principals valued as important to improve teacher underperformance was to place the underperforming teacher on a formal Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) (365, 89.0%). The use of a formal PIP is outlined for principals in Act 13 of 2020 legislation (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021) and is a requirement as part of the supervision and evaluation process in Pennsylvania, which could explain its frequent use by participants. Teachers that are rated as "needing improvement" on their end-of-the-year or mid-year (for non-tenured teachers) evaluation are required under Act 13 of 2020 to begin the next school year or semester on PIP. This plan is developed in collaboration between the teacher and principal and attempts to address areas of concern from the previous school year or semester along with specific suggestions and strategies to increase the teacher's performance. Another strategy that principals valued when addressing teacher underperformance was related to seeking support from central office. The third most common strategy principals valued was to consult with the superintendent or assistant superintendent (353, 83.7%) as to the next steps to take with the teacher. Finally, principals also valued the importance of assigning the underperforming teacher a mentor (340, 82.9%) as a common strategy to improve underperformance. Conversely, increasing teacher workload to encourage retirement or resignation (74, 6.1%), supporting a case settlement to encourage retirement or resignation (37, 9.0%), or transferring the teacher to another school (51, 12.4%) were the least valued strategies according to our participants.

From the frequency data analysis of overall strategies used by principals to encourage growth and development of the underperforming teacher, responses centered around strategies that required the school leader to take an active role in addressing the underperformance with continued documentation and formal requirements around the evaluation and supervision process required by law. Participant responses indicated that improvement of the teacher could be one of the main responsibilities of the school leader. Although principals sought guidance from the superintendent and assistant superintendent (353, 83.7%) and the Human Resources department (285, 69.5%), the bulk of the responses seemed to indicate that principals valued addressing teacher underperformance within the school. This appears to indicate that participants identify that the principal takes an active role or lead in attempting to help the underperforming teacher improve, but principals would also welcome additional assistance from district leadership.

The responses from the survey were further analyzed in bivariate crosstabulation tables by gender, ethnicity, school type, school locale, years of teaching experience by the principal, as well as years of experience as a school principal. Several statistically significant findings were found in the relationship between these factors.

**Gender and Strategies to Address Underperformance**

Analysis of responses based upon gender and the strategy used by school leaders to encourage improvement of the teacher were compiled in a crosstabulation format. Table 4.10 represents a crosstabulation of gender and principal valuation of assigning a mentor teacher to the underperforming teacher. The relationship between gender and the

principal's use of a teacher improvement strategy of assigning a mentor teacher to an underperforming teacher was statistically significant. On a percentage basis, female principals (45, 26.8%) were more apt to assign a mentor teacher very often to an underperforming teacher than male principals (26, 10.7%). It is interesting to note that male principals identified they rarely or never (45, 18.6%) used a mentor teacher as a strategy to address underperformance compared to female school leaders (12, 7.2%).

**Table 4.10**

*Crosstabulation of Gender by Principal Valuation of Assigning a Mentor Teacher*

| Gender | Principal Valuation of Assigning a Mentor Teacher | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very often | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Rarely | Never | Does not apply/ Can't do | Total |
| Male | 26 (10.7%) | 68 (28.1%) | 54 (22.3%) | 45 (18.6%) | 28 (11.6%) | 17 (7.0%) | 4 (1.7%) | 242 (100%) |
| Female | 45 (26.8%) | 40 (23.8%) | 31 (18.5%) | 31 (18.5%) | 9 (5.4%) | 7 (4.2%) | 5 (3.0%) | 168 (100%) |
| Total | 71 (17.3%) | 108 (26.3%) | 85 (20.7%) | 76 (18.5%) | 37 (9.0%) | 24 (5.9%) | 9 (2.2%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 22.56$, $\rho = <.001$

Similar results were found in the use of the strategy of asking a third party or impartial administrator to visit the classroom of the underperforming teacher to gather evidence of underperformance. Table 4.11 presents a crosstabulation of gender and principal valuation of asking another administrator to observe the teacher and gather evidence. The relationship between gender and the principal's use of a teacher improvement strategy of asking a third-party or impartial administrator to collect evidence on the underperforming teacher was also statistically significant. On a percentage basis, female principals reported using this strategy very often (30, 17.9%) compared to male principals (19, 7.9%). Interesting to note is that male principals (34, 14.0%) were twice as likely to never use this strategy compared to female principals (13, 7.7%).

**Table 4.11**

*Crosstabulation of Gender by Principal Valuation of Using an Impartial Administrator*

| Gender | Principal Valuation of Using an Impartial Administrator | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very often | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Rarely | Never | Does not apply/ Can't do | Total |
| Male | 19 (7.9%) | 59 (24.4%) | 81 (33.5%) | 26 (10.7) | 18 (7.4%) | 34 (14.0%) | 5 (2.1%) | 242 (100%) |
| Female | 30 (17.9%) | 33 (19.6%) | 44 (26.2%) | 29 (17.3%) | 17 (10.1%) | 13 (7.7%) | 2 (1.2%) | 168 (100%) |
| Total | 49 (12.0%) | 92 (22.4%) | 125 (30.5%) | 55 (13.4%) | 35 (8.5%) | 47 (11.5%) | 7 (1.7%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 18.889$, $\rho = .004$

Statistically significant findings were also found related to gender and the use of instructional coaches to provide support to a teacher who may be underperforming. Table 4.12 provides a crosstabulation of gender and principal valuation of assigning an instructional coach to work with an underperforming teacher. The relationship between gender and principal valuation of the importance of assigning a school-based instructional coach was statistically significant. On a percentage basis, female principals responded they used instructional coaches very often (47, 28.0%) compared to male principals (32, 13.2%). Combined, female principals valued the use of school-based instructional coaches very often or often (98, 58.4%) compared to male principals (97, 40.1%).

**Table 4.12**

*Crosstabulation of Gender by Principal Valuation of Instructional Coaches*

| Gender | Principal Valuation of Instructional Coaches | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very often | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Rarely | Never | Does not apply/ Can't do | Total |
| Male | 32 (13.2%) | 65 (26.9%) | 42 (17.4%) | 24 (9.9%) | 12 (5.0%) | 16 (6.6%) | 51 (21.1%) | 242 (100%) |
| Female | 47 (28.0%) | 51 (30.4%) | 13 (7.7%) | 14 (8.3%) | 4 (2.4%) | 6 (3.6%) | 33 (19.6%) | 168 (100%) |
| Total | 79 (19.3%) | 116 (28.3%) | 55 (13.4%) | 38 (9.3%) | 16 (3.9%) | 22 (5.4%) | 84 (20.5%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 22.232$, $\rho = .001$

Lastly, gender was also statistically significant in relation to principal valuation of using the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). EAP is a program that allows school leaders to offer the employee outside counseling and other mental health supports. EAP is a voluntary program that principals could suggest to teachers when the teacher was having difficulties at home or work. Based upon the responses from participants, the relationship between the gender of the principal and the principal's valuation of the use of the school district's EAP was statistically significant. On a percentage basis, female principals valued the use of EAP very often or often (53, 31.6%) compared to male principals (44, 18.2%). Also, it was interesting to note that more male principals reported they never use EAP (51, 21.1%) compared to female principals (21, 12.5%).

Taken together, female principals appear to value the importance of seeking outside support to help address teacher underperformance. The use of impartial administrators, mentors and counseling services from the EAP may show that female leaders associate the idea that helping a teacher improve is not solely the job of the school administrator but is a team effort from all members of the school district. Their use of district resources indicate they tended to value collaboration among other district members in order to address underperformance.

**Race and Strategies to Address Underperformance**

Aside from gender differences between strategies used to improve teacher underperformance, statistically significant differences were also found between race and teacher improvement strategies. The relationship between race of the principal and the principal's use of transferring an underperforming teacher to another school without the

teacher's consent as a strategy to improve teacher performance was statistically significant. On a percentage basis, white principals used this strategy very often, often or sometimes (22, 5.9%) compared to minority principals who never elected to use this strategy (0, 0%). There were no other statistically significant findings between race and strategies to address teacher underperformance.

**School Locale and Strategies to Address Underperformance**

Aside from the principal demographics associated with gender and race, several statistically significant findings were also found in relation to school demographics. Data was collected from participants indicating the name of the school district where the principal was employed. These responses were then aligned to the National Center for Educational Statistics Common Core Data set that categorized each school as urban, suburban, town or rural. There were several significant findings related to the demographics of the school and strategies to address underperformance.

The relationship between school locale and principal valuation of transferring the teacher to another school without the teacher's consent as a teacher improvement strategy was statistically significant. For example, rural school district principals (61, 58.7%) stated they never used this strategy compared to urban (23, 41.1%), suburban (96, 45.7%), and town (13, 32.5%) school districts. It is also worthy to note that suburban principals (19, 9.0%) stated they occasionally transferred the underperforming teacher to a different school to encourage improvement compared to all other school locales. Table 4.13 presents a crosstabulation of school locale with principal valuation of this strategy.

**Table 4.13**

*Crosstabulation of School Type by Principal Valuation of Involuntary Transfer of a Teacher to a Different School*

| School Locale | Principal Valuation of Involuntary Transfer of a Teacher to a Different School | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very often | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Rarely | Never | Does not apply/ Can't do | Total |
| Urban | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1.8%) | 1 (1.8%) | 11 (19.6%) | 23 (41.1%) | 20 (35.7%) | 56 (100%) |
| Suburban | 1 (0.5%) | 4 (1.9%) | 6 (2.9%) | 19 (9.0%) | 48 22.9%) | 96 (45.7%) | 36 (17.1%) | 210 (100%) |
| Town | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 4 (10.0%) | 2 5.0%) | 12 (30.0%) | 13 (32.5%) | 9 (22.5%) | 40 (100%) |
| Rural | 0 (0%) | 1 (1.0%) | 5 (4.8%) | 7 (6.7%) | 16 (15.4%) | 61 (58.7%) | 14 (13.5%) | 104 (100%) |
| Total | 1 (0.2%) | 5 (1.2%) | 16 (3.9%) | 29 (7.1%) | 87 (21.2%) | 193 (47.1%) | 79 (19.3%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 30.001$, $\rho = .029$

Statistically significant differences were also found in relation to school locale and the strategy of assigning a mentor teacher. The relationship between school locale and principal valuation of assigning a mentor teacher as a teacher improvement strategy was statistically significant. On a percentage basis, urban principals (17, 30.4%) very often assigned a mentor teacher compared to suburban (36, 17.1%), town (8, 20.0%) or rural (10, 9.6%) school district principals. Additionally, rural school leaders reported assigning a mentor teacher occasionally (29, 27.9%) compared to urban (7, 12.5%), suburban (34, 16.2%), and town (6, 15.0%) principals. Table 4.14 presents a crosstabulation of school locale with principal valuation of this strategy.

**Table 4.14**

*Crosstabulation of School Locale by Principal Valuation of Assigning a Mentor Teacher*

| School Locale | Principal Valuation of Assigning a Mentor Teacher | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very often | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Rarely | Never | Does not apply/ Can't do | Total |
| Urban | 17 (30.4%) | 18 (32.1%) | 9 (16.1%) | 7 (12.5%) | 4 (7.1%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1.8%) | 56 (100%) |
| Suburban | 36 (17.1%) | 54 (25.7%) | 48 (22.9%) | 34 (16.2%) | 19 (9.0%) | 17 (8.1%) | 2 (1.0%) | 210 (100%) |
| Town | 8 (20.0%) | 8 (20.0%) | 7 (17.5%) | 6 (15.0%) | 5 (12.5%) | 2 (5.0%) | 4 (10.0%) | 40 (100%) |
| Rural | 10 (9.6%) | 28 (26.9%) | 21 (20.2%) | 29 (27.9%) | 9 (8.7%) | 5 (4.8%) | 2 (1.9%) | 104 (100%) |
| Total | 71 (17.3%) | 108 (26.3%) | 85 (20.7%) | 76 (18.5%) | 37 (9.0%) | 24 (5.9%) | 9 (2.2%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 37.551$, $\rho = .004$

In addition to statistically significant results between school locale and assigning a mentor teacher or transferring the teacher to encourage improvement, significant findings were also found in relation to school locale and use of instructional coaches to encourage improvement of an underperforming teacher. Table 4.15 presents a crosstabulation of school locale and the use of instructional coaches with underperforming teachers. The relationship between the school locale and principal valuation of the use of instructional coaches was statistically significant. On a percentage basis, urban principals (20, 35.7%) reported they very often used instructional coaches as a strategy to assist the underperforming teacher compared to suburban (43, 20.5%), town (5, 12.5%), and rural (11 (10.6%) principals. Urban principals (42, 75.0%) also reported their use of this strategy very often or often compared to suburban (108, 51.5%), town (13, 32.5%), and rural (32, 30.8%) principals. See Table 4.15 for additional details.

**Table 4.15**

*Crosstabulation of School Locale by Principal Valuation of the Use of Instructional Coaches*

| School Locale | Principal Valuation of the Use of Instructional Coaches | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very often | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Rarely | Never | Does not apply/ Can't do | Total |
| Urban | 20 (35.7%) | 22 (39.3%) | 8 (14.3%) | 3 (5.4%) | 1 (1.8%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (3.6%) | 56 (100%) |
| Suburban | 43 (20.5%) | 65 (31.0%) | 27 (12.9%) | 16 (7.6%) | 11 (5.2%) | 12 (5.7%) | 36 (17.1%) | 210 (100%) |
| Rural | 11 (10.6%) | 21 (20.2%) | 16 (15.4%) | 14 (13.5%) | 1 (1.0%) | 8 (7.7%) | 33 (31.7%) | 104 (100%) |
| Town | 5 (12.5%) | 8 (20.0%) | 4 (10.0%) | 5 (12.5%) | 3 (7.5%) | 2 (5.0%) | 13 (32.5%) | 40 (100%) |
| Total | 79 (19.3%) | 116 (28.3%) | 55 (13.4%) | 38 (9.3%) | 16 (3.9%) | 22 (5.4%) | 84 (20.5%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 51.591$, $\rho = <.001$

Principals in this study also reported seeking support from different members of the school district to assist with addressing teacher underperformance that were related to school demographics. Table 4.16 presents a crosstabulation of school locale and principal valuation of seeking advice from the superintendent or assistant superintendent on the next steps to take with an underperforming teacher. The relationship between school locale and the principal consulting with the superintendent or assistant superintendent regarding steps to take to address an underperforming teacher was statistically significant. On a percentage basis, rural (59, 56.8%) and town (27, 67.5%) principals reported they consulted with the superintendent or assistant superintendent very often or often on how to address teacher underperformance compared to urban (17, 30.4%) and suburban (101, 48.1%) principals. See Table 4.16 for additional details.

**Table 4.16**

*Crosstabulation of School Locale by Principal Valuation of Seeking Advice from the Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent*

| School Locale | Principal Valuation of Seeking Advice from the Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very often | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Rarely | Never | Does not apply/ Can't do | Total |
| Urban | 10 (17.9%) | 7 (12.5%) | 16 (28.6%) | 8 (14.3%) | 9 (16.1%) | 4 (7.1%) | 2 (3.6%) | 56 (100%) |
| Suburban | 36 (17.1%) | 65 (31.0%) | 46 (21.9%) | 26 (12.4%) | 16 (7.6%) | 20 (9.5%) | 1 (0.5%) | 210 (100%) |
| Town | 13 (32.5%) | 14 (35.0%) | 3 (7.5%) | 5 (12.5%) | 2 (5.0%) | 2 (5.0%) | 1 (2.5%) | 40 (100%) |
| Rural | 27 (26.0%) | 32 (30.8%) | 23 (22.1%) | 12 (11.5%) | 9 (8.7%) | 1 (1.0%) | 0 (0%) | 104 (100%) |
| Total | 86 (21.0%) | 118 (28.8%) | 88 (21.5%) | 51 (12.4%) | 36 (8.8%) | 27 (6.6%) | 4 (1.0%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 35.556$, $\rho = .008$

In addition to seeking advice from the superintendent or assistant superintendent, principals also valued seeking advice from the Human Resources department. The relationship between school locale and principal's use of the Human Resources department to provide guidance to the principal on steps to take to address underperformance was statistically significant. On a percentage basis, suburban principals (93, 44.2%) reported consulting the Human Resources department very often or often compared to principals in urban (19, 33.9%), town (8, 20.0%), and rural (27, 26.0%) school districts. Collectively, urban, and suburban school district principals appeared to value the use of consulting with the Human Resource department as a strategy to address underperformance compared to rural or town school district principals. Table 4.17 presents a crosstabulation of school locale with principal valuation of this strategy.

**Table 4.17**

*Crosstabulation of School Locale by Principal Valuation of Consulting the Human Resources Department*

| School Locale | Principal Valuation of Consulting the Human Resources Department | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very often | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Rarely | Never | Does not apply/ Can't do | Total |
| Urban | 7 (12.5%) | 12 (21.4%) | 18 (32.1%) | 5 (8.9%) | 6 (10.7%) | 3 (5.4%) | 5 (8.9%) | 56 (100%) |
| Suburban | 36 (17.1%) | 57 (27.1%) | 45 (21.4%) | 17 (8.1%) | 26 (12.4%) | 19 (9.0%) | 10 (4.8%) | 210 (100%) |
| Town | 2 (5.0%) | 6 (15.0%) | 9 (22.5%) | 6 (15.0%) | 3 (7.5%) | 6 (15.0%) | 8 (20.0%) | 40 (100%) |
| Rural | 6 (5.8%) | 21 (20.2%) | 17 (16.3%) | 21 (20.2%) | 9 (8.7%) | 12 (11.5%) | 18 (17.3%) | 104 (100%) |
| Total | 51 (12.4%) | 96 (23.4%) | 89 (21.7%) | 49 (12.0%) | 44 (10.7%) | 40 (9.8%) | 41 (10.0%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 45.118$, $\rho = <.001$

Aside from differences between school locale and seeking advice from others outside the school, principals also used formal procedures to assist underperforming teachers that resulted in statistically significant findings. Table 4.18 illustrates statistically significant differences between school locale and placement of the teacher on a formal Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). PIPs are created between the teacher and principal to formally document areas of growth and improvement as well as suggested action steps to take to improve and are a requirement of Act 13 of 2020 for teachers that are underperforming and in jeopardy of receiving a final rating of needs improvement or failing. Table 1.1 illustrates the final scores of teachers in Pennsylvania that would result in a teacher receiving a needs improvement or failing rating and triggering the creation of a PIP by the school principal. The relationship between school locale and the principal's use of placing an underperforming teacher on a PIP was statistically significant. On a percentage basis, rural (39, 37.5%) and town (14, 35.0%) principals reported the use of a PIP very often compared to urban (16, 28.6%) and suburban principals (67, 31.9%). However, suburban (62, 29.5%) and urban (17, 30.4%) principals did use this strategy often when attempting to address underperformance.

**Table 4.18**

*Crosstabulation of School Locale by Principal Valuation of the Use of Performance Improvement Plan*

| School Locale | Principal Valuation of the Use of Performance Improvement Plan | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very often | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Rarely | Never | Does not apply/ Can't do | Total |
| Urban | 16 (28.6%) | 17 (30.4%) | 18 (32.1%) | 0 (0%) | 4 (7.1%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1.8%) | 56 (100%) |
| Suburban | 67 (31.9%) | 62 (29.5%) | 43 (20.5%) | 20 (9.5%) | 10 (4.8%) | 7 (3.3%) | 1 (0.5%) | 210 (100%) |
| Town | 14 (35.0%) | 6 (15.0%) | 13 (32.5%) | 0 (0%) | 5 (12.5%) | 2 (5.0%) | 0 (0%) | 40 (100%) |
| Rural | 39 (37.5%) | 27 (26.0%) | 19 (18.3%) | 4 (3.8%) | 10 (9.6%) | 5 (4.8%) | 0 (0%) | 104 (100%) |
| Total | 136 (33.2%) | 112 (27.3%) | 93 (22.7%) | 24 (5.9%) | 29 (7.1%) | 14 (3.4%) | 2 (0.5%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 30.003$, $\rho = .037$

Lastly, school locale and use of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) was also a statistically significant finding. The relationship between school locale and the principal's use of the EAP was statistically significant. On a percentage basis, urban (17, 30.3%) and suburban (56, 26.7%) principals reported using this program very often or often compared to town (6, 15.0%) and rural (18, 17.3%) principals. Additionally, town (11, 27.5%) and rural principals (18, 17.3%) reported it did not apply or they were unable to use the program compared to urban (6, 10.7%) and suburban (11, 5.2%) principals. Table 4.19 presents a crosstabulation of school locale with principal valuation of this strategy.

**Table 4.19**

*Crosstabulation of School Locale by Principal Valuation of the Use of the Employee Assistance Program*

| School Locale | Principal Valuation of the Use of the Employee Assistance Program | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very often | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Rarely | Never | Does not apply/ Can't do | Total |
| Urban | 6 (10.7%) | 11 (19.6%) | 8 (14.3%) | 9 (16.1%) | 7 (12.5%) | 9 (16.1%) | 6 (10.7%) | 56 (100%) |
| Suburban | 26 (12.4%) | 30 (14.3%) | 50 (23.8%) | 35 (16.7%) | 33 (15.7%) | 25 (11.9%) | 11 (5.2%) | 210 (100%) |
| Rural | 6 (5.8%) | 12 (11.5%) | 18 (17.3%) | 16 (15.4%) | 9 (8.7%) | 25 (24.0%) | 18 (17.3%) | 104 (100%) |
| Town | 2 (5.0%) | 4 (10.0%) | 3 (7.5%) | 3 (7.5%) | 4 (10.0%) | 13 (32.5%) | 11 (27.5%) | 40 (100%) |
| Total | 40 (9.8%) | 57 (13.9%) | 79 (19.3%) | 63 (15.4%) | 53 (12.9%) | 72 (17.6%) | 46 (11.2%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 48.339$, $\rho = .<.001$

**School Type and Strategies to Address Underperformance**

In addition to gender, race, and school locale, statistically significant findings were also found in relation to the type of school that principals led. Demographic information collected in the survey included principals identifying the grades of schools they led. Schools in the survey were divided into traditional categories of elementary, middle and high schools. A fourth category was created for schools that contained a combination of middle and high school grades. Statistically significant findings were identified between school type and several variables.

First, the relationship between the type of school the principal led and the principal's use of instructional coaches as a strategy to improve teacher underperformance was statistically significant (see Table 4.20). On a percentage basis, elementary principals reported using instructional coaches to address teacher underperformance very often or often (118, 55.4%) compared to principals at middle schools (27, 40.3%), high schools (40, 45.9%), and schools combined with middle and high school grades (10, 23.3%). It is interesting to note that principals at schools with combined middle and high school grades (16, 37.2%) reported this strategy does not apply or they cannot use coaches compared to elementary (26, 16.9%), middle school (13, 19.4%) and high school (19, 21.8%) principals. Potentially, principals in elementary schools may appear more apt to value this strategy due to the availability of instructional coaches in elementary schools. More research would be needed to understand if there are differences between where most instructional coaches are employed to better determine the valuation of this strategy.

**Table 4.20**

*Crosstabulation of School Type by Principal Valuation of the Use of Instructional Coaches*

| School Type | Principal Valuation of the Use of Instructional Coaches | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very often | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Rarely | Never | Does not apply/ Can't do | Total |
| Elementary School | 48 (22.5%) | 70 (32.9%) | 25 (11.7%) | 17 (8.0%) | 6 (2.8%) | 11 (5.2%) | 36 (16.9%) | 213 (100%) |
| Middle School | 10 (14.9%) | 17 (25.4%) | 10 (14.9%) | 7 (10.4%) | 5 (7.5%) | 5 (7.5%) | 13 (19.4%) | 67 (100%) |
| High School | 17 (19.5%) | 23 (26.4%) | 14 (16.1%) | 6 (6.9%) | 5 (5.7%) | 3 (3.4%) | 19 (21.8%) | 87 (100%) |
| Middle and High School | 4 (9.3%) | 6 (14.0%) | 6 (14.0%) | 8 (18.6%) | 0 (0%) | 3 (7.0%) | 16 (37.2%) | 43 (100%) |
| Total | 79 (19.3%) | 116 (28.3%) | 55 (13.4%) | 38 (9.3%) | 16 (3.9%) | 22 (5.4%) | 84 (20.5%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 29.097$, $\rho = .047$

Secondly, statistically significant differences were also found between school type and principal valuation of the use of seeking advice from the Human Resources department. Table 4.21 presents a crosstabulation of school type and principal valuation of consulting with Human Resources on steps to take with an underperforming teacher. On a percentage basis, principals working in elementary (80, 37.5%) and middle schools (27, 40.3%) valued seeking advice from the Human Resources department on the next steps to take to address the performance of an underperforming teacher compared to principals at high schools (30, 23.3%) and schools with combined middle and high school grades (10, 23.3%). See Table 4.21 for additional information.

**Table 4.21**

*Crosstabulation of School Type by Principal Valuation of Consulting the Human Resources Department*

| School Type | Principal Valuation of Consulting the Human Resources Department | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very often | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Rarely | Never | Does not apply/ Can't do | Total |
| Elementary School | 29 (13.6%) | 51 (23.9%) | 46 (21.6%) | 25 (11.7%) | 20 (9.4%) | 22 (10.3%) | 20 (9.4%) | 213 (100%) |
| Middle School | 11 (16.4%) | 16 (23.9%) | 13 (19.4%) | 8 (11.9%) | 10 (14.9%) | 7 (10.4%) | 2 (3.0%) | 67 (100%) |
| High School | 8 (9.2%) | 22 (25.3%) | 23 (26.4%) | 13 (14.9%) | 9 (10.3%) | 6 (6.9%) | 6 (6.9%) | 87 (100%) |
| Middle and High School | 3 (7.0%) | 7 (16.3%) | 7 (16.3%) | 3 (7.0%) | 5 (11.6%) | 5 (11.6%) | 13(30.2%) | 43 (100%) |
| Total | 51 (12.4%) | 96 (23.4%) | 89 (21.7%) | 49 (12.0%) | 44 (10.7%) | 40 (9.8%) | 41 (10.0%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 31.453$, $\rho = .025$

### Teaching Experience Prior to Becoming a Principal and Strategies to Address Underperformance

The final area where statistically significant results were found to help answer Research Question 3 was found in the relationship between the years of teaching experience of the school principal and the strategies they implemented to encourage improvement of the underperforming teacher. As mentioned earlier, respondents indicated in their responses the years of experience they had as a classroom teacher (0 years, 1–4 years, 5–9 years, 10–14 years, and 15 or more years).

The relationship between the years of teaching experience of the school principal and the principal's valuation of the use of placing an underperforming teacher on a formal Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) as a strategy to address teacher performance was statistically significant (see Table 4.22). On a percentage basis, principals with more experience—5–9 years (127, 62.3%), 10–14 years (76, 60.8%), and 15 or more years (38, 62.3%)—responded they used a PIP very often or often compared to principals with 0 years or 1–4 years of teaching experience (7, 46.7%).

**Table 4.22**

*Crosstabulation of Principal Teaching Experience by Principal Valuation of the Use of a Performance Improvement Plan*

| Years of Teaching Experience | Principal Valuation of the Use of a Performance Improvement Plan | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very often | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Rarely | Never | Does not apply/ Can't do | Total |
| 0 years | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 3 (60.0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (20.0%) | 1 (20.0%) | 0 (0%) | 5 (100%) |
| 1–4 years | 0 (0%) | 7 (46.7%) | 7 (46.7%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (6.7%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 15 (100%) |
| 5–9 years | 71 (34.8%) | 56 (27.5%) | 47 (23.0%) | 13 (6.4%) | 14 (6.9%) | 1 (0.5%) | 2 1.0%) | 204 (100%) |
| 10–14 years | 44 (35.2%) | 32 (25.6%) | 26 (20.8%) | 8 (6.4%) | 8 (6.4%) | 7 (5.6%) | 0 (0%) | 125 (100%) |
| 15 or more years | 21 (34.4%) | 17 (27.9%) | 10 (16.4%) | 3 (4.9%) | 5 (8.2%) | 5 (8.2%) | 0 (0%) | 61 (100%) |
| Total | 136 (33.2%) | 112 (27.3%) | 93 (22.7%) | 24 (5,9%) | 29 (7.1%) | 14 (3.4%) | 2 (0.5%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 39.000$, $\rho = .027$

In total, Research Question 3 sought to understand the strategies principals used to address teacher underperformance and how those strategies may differ based upon the characteristics of the school or school leader. Principals responded that they utilized many of the strategies presented to them in the survey. However, responses indicated a potential heavy reliance on the use of formal supports such as the use of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), and the continued collection of evidence to document teacher underperformance as strategies principals in the sample valued. Further data analysis indicated that principals valued guidance and support from both the superintendent and assistant superintendent as well as the Human Resources department in the next steps to take to address a teacher's underperformance and differed between school and principal demographics. Principals also valued the use of instructional coaches and the importance of asking third-party impartial administrators to also observe the teacher to gather evidence. Taken together, principals have indicated they have attempted a wide variety of strategies to encourage teacher growth and development, and the use of these strategies statistically differed based upon the gender, race, school locale, school type and both the years of teaching experience and administrative experience of the school principal.

### Research Question 4: What barriers do principals face as they attempt to address teacher underperformance?

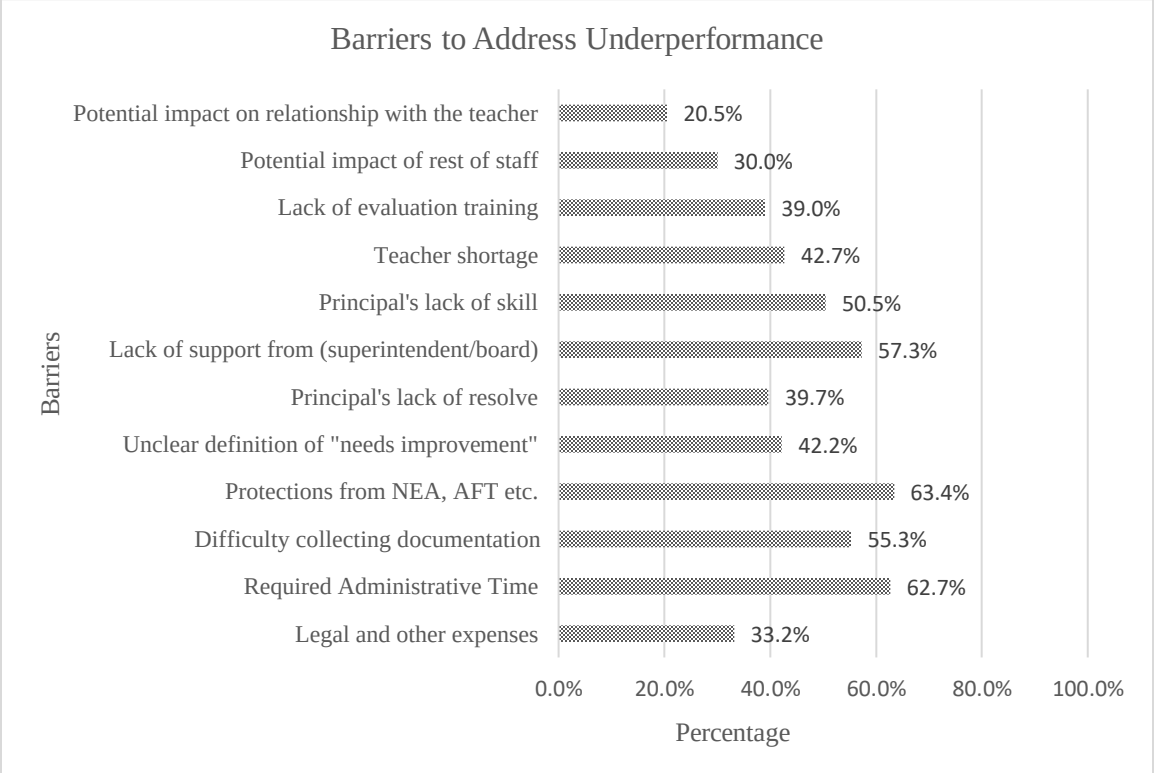
To answer Research Question Four, data was analyzed from participant responses to understand overall barriers identified by principals. Barriers were identified based upon previous research in this area. Responses were collapsed between the 12 barriers presented that principals rated as very important or important to determine the percentage

of principals who valued the item as a potential barrier. Data was further analyzed in crosstabulation tables based upon respondent gender, race/ethnicity, school locale, school type, years of experience as a classroom teacher, and years of experience as a school principal.

Overall, principals identified that perceived protections from teacher unions like the National Education Association (NEA) and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) (260, 63.4%) as the number one barrier to addressing teacher underperformance. AFT and NEA are the two largest teacher unions in the United States, and principals valued them as potential barriers to addressing underperformance. Secondly, principals also indicated that the required administrative time (257, 62.7%) for documenting teacher underperformance was a potential barrier. Finally, principals also indicated that they perceived a lack of support from the superintendent or school board (235,57.3%) and was a potential barrier that could prevent them from addressing teacher underperformance. Conversely, the potential relationship between the principal and teacher (84, 20.5%) was the least valued barrier by principals followed closely by the potential impact on the rest of the teaching staff (123, 30.0%) and legal expenses (136, 33.2%). Figure 4.5 summarizes overall barriers, and their frequency reported by principals in this study as they attempted to address teacher underperformance.

**Figure 4.5**

*Summary of Barriers to Address Underperformance*




In additional to global perceptions of barriers by school principals, data was further analyzed in crosstabulations for each of the 12 barriers presented in the survey and the variables of gender, race/ethnicity, school locale, school type, and both the years of experience as a classroom teacher and as a principal. Four variables resulted in statistically significant relationships related to barriers principals faced as they addressed underperformance.

**Gender and Barriers to Addressing Underperformance**

The relationship between gender and principal valuation of an unclear definition of “needs improvement” as a potential barrier to address underperformance of a teacher

was the only statistically significant result related to gender (see Table 4.23). On a percentage basis, female principals (81, 48.2%) identified that an unclear definition of what constitutes "needs improvement" was a very important or important barrier to them addressing teacher underperformance compared to male principals (92, 38.1%). Male principals appeared somewhat indifferent to this variable as compared to female principals. For example, on a percentage basis, male principals (88, 36.4%) rated an unclear definition of "needs improvement" as somewhat important and somewhat unimportant as a barrier to address underperformance more often than female principals (40, 23.8%).

**Table 4.23**

*Crosstabulation of Gender by Principal Valuation of an Unclear Definition of "Needs Improvement" as a Barrier to Address Teacher Underperformance*

| Gender | Principal Valuation of an Unclear Definition of "Needs Improvement" as a Barrier to Address Teacher Underperformance | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very unimportant | Unimportant | Somewhat important/ Somewhat unimportant | Important | Very important | Total |
| Male | 8 (3.3%) | 54 (22.3%) | 88 (36.4%) | 72 (29.8%) | 20 (8.3%) | 242 (100%) |
| Female | 13 (7.7%) | 34 (20.2%) | 40 (23.8%) | 58 (34.5%) | 23 (13.7%) | 168 (100%) |
| Total | 21 (5.1%) | 88 (21.5%) | 128 (31.3%) | 130 (31.7%) | 43 (10.5%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 12.504$, $\rho = .014$

**Race and Barriers to Addressing Underperformance**

Statistically significant differences were also found between the race of the principal and the valuation of an unclear definition of "needs improvement" as a barrier to address teacher underperformance (see Table 4.24). On a percentage basis, white principals (160, 42.7%) felt the lack of a clear definition of what constituted a "needs improvement" teacher was very important or important compared to minority principals (13, 37.1%). Additionally, minority principals (6, 17.1%) felt this variable was also very unimportant as a barrier to address teacher underperformance as compared to white principals (15, 4.0%). It is also interesting to note that white principals expressed that the lack of a clear definition of "needs improvement" was unimportant (85, 22.7%). In sum, there appears to be a somewhat mixed result between principal race and their valuation of whether a "needs improvement" definition was important or unimportant as a barrier to addressing teacher underperformance.

**Table 4.24**

*Crosstabulation of Race by Principal Valuation of an Unclear Definition of "Needs Improvement" as a Barrier to Address Teacher Underperformance*

| Minority status | Principal Valuation of an Unclear Definition of "Needs Improvement" as a Barrier to Address Teacher Underperformance | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very unimportant | Unimportant | Somewhat important/ Somewhat unimportant | Important | Very important | Total |
| Non-minority | 15 (4.0%) | 85 (22.7%) | 115 (30.7%) | 121 (32.3%) | 39 (10.4%) | 375 (100%) |
| Minority | 6 (17.1%) | 3 (8.6%) | 13 (37.1%) | 9 (25.7%) | 4 (11.4%) | 35 (100%) |
| Total | 21 (5.1%) | 88 (21.5%) | 128 (31.2%) | 130 (31.7%) | 43 (10.5%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 14.655$, $\rho = .005$

## School Locale and Barriers to Addressing Underperformance

In addition to gender and race, statistically significant findings were found between school locale and the barrier of legal expenses (see Table 4.25). Although legal barriers were not valued by most principals (see Figure 4.5) as a significant barrier overall, the relationship between school locale and legal barriers as a potential barrier to address underperformance was statistically significant. Town (17, 42.5%) and rural (39, 37.5%) principals were more apt to value legal expenses as a very important or important barrier to addressing teacher performance than were urban (17, 30.3%) and suburban (63, 30.0%) principals.

**Table 4.25**

*Crosstabulation of School Locale by Principal Valuation of Legal Expenses as a Barrier to Address Teacher Underperformance*

| School Locale | Principal Valuation of Legal Expenses as a Barrier to Address Teacher Underperformance | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very unimportant | Unimportant | Somewhat important/ Somewhat unimportant | Important | Very important | Total |
| Urban | 11 (19.6%) | 15 (26.8%) | 13 (23.2%) | 12 (21.4%) | 5 (8.9%) | 56 (100%) |
| Suburban | 22 (10.5%) | 67 (31.9%) | 58 (27.6%) | 41 (19.5%) | 22 (10.5%) | 210 (100%) |
| Town | 1 (2.5%) | 10 (25.0%) | 12 (30.0%) | 12 (30.0%) | 5 (12.5%) | 40 (100%) |
| Rural | 10 (9.6%) | 17 (16.3%) | 38 (36.5%) | 32 (30.8%) | 7 (6.7%) | 104 (100%) |
| Total | 44 (10.7%) | 109 (26.6%) | 121 (29.5%) | 97 (23.7%) | 39 (9.5%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 21.913$, $\rho = .039$

## Teaching Experience Prior to Becoming Principal and Barriers to Addressing Underperformance

Another area where responses yielded statistically significant results related to barriers to addressing underperformance was related to the years of teaching experience the principal had prior to becoming a school leader (see Table 4.26). As mentioned earlier, participants identified their years of experience as a classroom teacher (0 years, 1–4 years, 5–9 years, 10–14 years and 15 or more years.) The relationship between the principal's years of teaching experience prior to becoming a principal and principal valuation of a lack of support from the school board or superintendent was statistically significant. On a percentage basis, principals with more experience—15 or more years

(45, 73.7%)—rated that lack of support from the superintendent and school board was a very important or important barrier to addressing underperformance more than principals with less experience—10–14 years (75, 60.0%), 5–9 years (107, 52.4%), and 1–4 years (8, 53.3%).

**Table 4.26**

*Crosstabulation of Principal Teaching Experience by Principal Valuation of School Board or Superintendent Support as a Barrier to Address Teacher Underperformance*

| Years of Teaching Experience | Principal Valuation of School Board or Superintendent Support as a Barrier to Address Teacher Underperformance | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very unimportant | Unimportant | Somewhat Important/ Somewhat unimportant | Important | Very important | Total |
| 0 years | 2 (40.0%) | 0 (0%) | 3 (60.0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 5 (100%) |
| 1–4 years | 1 (6.7%) | 3 (20.0%) | 3 (20.0%) | 5 (33.3%) | 3 (20.0%) | 15 (100%) |
| 5–9 years | 16 (7.8%) | 41 (20.1%) | 40 (19.6%) | 77 (37.7%) | 30 (14.7%) | 204 (100%) |
| 10–14 years | 5 (4.0%) | 19 (15.2%) | 26 (20.8%) | 51 (40.8%) | 24 (19.2%) | 125 (100%) |
| 15 or more years | 5 (8.2%) | 3 (4.9%) | 8 (13.1%) | 29 (47.5%) | 16 (26.2%) | 61 (100%) |
| Total | 29 (7.1%) | 66 (16.1%) | 80 (19.5%) | 162 (39.5%) | 73 (17.8%) | 410 (100%) |

$\chi 2 = 30.908$, $\rho = .014$

In conclusion, Research Question 4 attempted to understand the barriers that principals faced when they attempted to address teacher underperformance. The largest

barrier identified from a global perspective of all participants was the protection teachers may have from national teacher unions such as the National Education Association (NEA) and American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Principals also claimed that the administrative time required to address teacher underperformance was a factor in their attempt to address teacher underperformance. Multiple competing priorities for principals that requires their time and attention may be factors that could explain why principals felt time was a significant barrier for them. Additionally, female principals felt that an unclear definition of what constituted a "needs improvement" teacher was a potential barrier for them. Conversely, minority principals felt that an unclear definition of "needs improvement teaching" was not an important barrier compared to white principals who identified that as a very important barrier to addressing teacher underperformance. However, a similar percentage of white principals also indicated that the unclear definition of "needs improvement" was not a significant barrier for them, resulting in some conflicting relationships between race and the barrier.

Aside from gender and race, the school location also resulted in differences between participants. Principals in more rural areas found that legal expenses were a more significant barrier when addressing teacher underperformance than principals in more populated urban and suburban school districts. Lastly, the teaching experience of the school principal also resulted in significant findings. Principals with more experience as classroom teachers identified that they valued a perceived lack of support from the superintendent or school board as a major barrier that prevented them from addressing teacher underperformance as compared to principals with less classroom experience.

## Impact of Characteristics, Strategies, and Barriers of Underperformance on Principal Job Satisfaction

The question of how the characteristics of teacher underperformance coupled with strategies principals used to address underperformance and the barriers they faced as they attempted to improve teacher quality was also related to overall principal job satisfaction. To determine the impact of principal job satisfaction in relation to the variables in the research, a regression analysis was conducted on several variables. Principal job satisfaction was measured on a 5 point scale (1=strong agree

### Variables Entered in the Regression Analysis

The regression model included nine variables against the dependent variable of principal job satisfaction. The regression model tested the relationship between the variables of gender, minority status, years as a principal, number of schools in the district, professional development or training on teacher evaluation, characteristics of underperformance, causes of underperformance, strategies to address underperformance, and barriers to addressing underperformance. See Table 4.27 for additional details including means, range and standard deviations. Other variables such as school location, school level (elementary, middle and high school), the number of students in the district were tested but ultimately omitted in the regression model due to statistical insignificance.

**Table 4.27**

*Variables Studied in Regression Related to Principal Job Satisfaction*

| Regression Variable | Mean Proportion | Standard Deviation | Range |
|---|---|---|---|
| Male | .59 | | |
| Minority Principal | .09 | | |
| Years as Principal | 9.1 | 6.2 | 2.5-20 |
| Number of Schools in District | 17.5 | 46.12 | 1-218 |
| Professional Development | 5.7 | 1.84 | 1-8 |
| Characteristics of Underperformance | 73.5 | 6.33 | 49-85 |
| Causes of Underperformance | 18.3 | 3.63 | 6-30 |
| Strategies to Address Underperformance | 34.1 | 7.63 | 11-53 |
| Barriers | 38.4 | 7.52 | 12-56 |
| Principal Job Satisfaction (Constant) | 33.2 | 6.64 | 14-45 |

**Correlation Between Regression Variables**

Multiple variables were entered into the regression model and checked for multicollinearity. The correlation regression analysis performed on the nine independent

variables determined through Pearson's correlation coefficient that no multicollinearity was found as seen in Table 4.28.

**Table 4.28**

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Variables Studied in Regression Related to Principal Job Satisfaction*

| Variable | Male | Minority Principal | Years as Principal | Evaluation Professional Development | Number of Schools in District | Characteristics of Underperformance | Causes of Underperformance | Strategies to Address Underperformance | Barriers to Address Underperformance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 1 | 0.065 | -0.008 | -0.191 | 0.059 | 0.087 | 0.042 | 0.107 | 0.059 |
| Minority Principal | | 1 | -0.009 | -0.057 | 0.311 | 0.103 | -0.01 | -0.015 | -0.031 |
| Years as Principal | | | 1 | 0.143 | 0.078 | 0.088 | -0.042 | 0.094 | -0.038 |
| Professional Development | | | | 1 | 0.064 | 0.06 | 0.022 | 0.16 | -0.057 |
| Number of Schools in District | | | | | 1 | 0.074 | 0.008 | 0.034 | 0.013 |
| Characteristics of Underperformance | | | | | | 1 | 0.029 | 0.094 | 0.099 |
| Causes of Underperformance | | | | | | | 1 | 0.222 | 0.104 |
| Strategies to Address Underperformance | | | | | | | | 1 | -0.019 |
| Barriers to Address Underperformance | | | | | | | | | 1 |

**Regression Findings**

The regression model in this research resulted in an $R^2$ value of .109, and a p-value of < .001. See Table 4.29 for additional information. In other words, the regression model resulted in a statistically significant findings between principal job satisfaction when all the independent variables were collectively taken as a group. However, only 11.0% of the variance in principal job satisfaction is related to the independent variables of the model. There were four variables that resulted in a positive or negative statistically significant relationships between principal job satisfaction and the independent variable. The findings will be mentioned below.

- Gender, race, principal experience, the number of schools in the district, characteristics of underperformance, and strategies to address underperformance were unrelated to principal job satisfaction.
- Professional Development opportunities for principals around the evaluation process was statistically significant with a ($p < .001$). Meaning, for every additional professional development opportunity around supervision and evaluation principal job satisfaction increased by 0.683.
- Principal job satisfaction was also statistically significant in relation to potential causes for underperformance ($p < .001$). Specifically, principal job satisfaction decreased by -0.299 for every additional potential cause of underperformance.
- Strategies to address teacher underperformance was also related to principal job satisfaction and was statistically significant ($p < .05$). For every strategy

that principal valued or tried with underperforming teachers their job satisfaction increased by 0.100.

- Barriers and principal job satisfaction also resulted in statistically significant findings ($p < .001$). In other words, for every additional barrier that principals identified, their job satisfaction decreased by -0.141.

**Table 4.29**

*Regression of Principal Job Satisfaction by Variable*

| Regression variable | Regression coefficient (B) | Beta | t |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | 0.363 | 0.027 | 0.550 |
| Minority Principal | 0.211 | 1.191 | 0.009 |
| Years as Principal | -0.045 | -0.042 | -0.875 |
| Number of Schools in District | -0.008 | -0.057 | -1.134 |
| Evaluation Preparation Professional Development | 0.638 | 0.176 | 3.551** |
| Characteristics of Underperformance | 0.096 | 0.092 | 1.896 |
| Causes of Underperformance | -0.299 | -0.163 | -3.345** |
| Strategies to Address Underperformance | 0.100 | 0.115 | 2.316* |
| Barriers | -0.141 | -0.160 | -3.327** |
| Principal Job Satisfaction (Constant) | 29.978 | | 7.008 |

$R^2 = 0.109$, *F stat* = 5.415, $p < .001$

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

In conclusion, principal job satisfaction was related to four variables in the regression analysis. The first variable related to principal job satisfaction was professional development and coursework on teacher evaluation. Specifically, with more training during principal preparation coursework, and professional development opportunities provided by the school district around supervision and evaluation procedures principals may become more satisfied with their jobs. This would be worthy of school districts to consider as they develop supervision and evaluation processes. By increasing principal knowledge and skills to address teacher underperformance they may be able to increase their ability to address teacher quality while not feeling dissatisfied with their job as a school leader.

Additionally, the second variable related to principal job satisfaction was potential causes of underperformance. Findings seem to indicate that for every instance of a cause for teacher underperformance (personal issues, financial issues etc.) principals became less satisfied in their jobs. This finding could indicate that principals often identified the causes of underperformance as something that may be outside their control, and may have indicated they understood the cause. This decreased job satisfaction outcome may indicate that principals felt compassion and understanding about why teachers may be underperforming, but ultimately understood these factors were beyond their control.

In addition to professional development and causes of underperformance, the strategies principals used with underperforming teachers were related to principal job satisfaction. Specifically, as principals used more strategies to address underperformance their job satisfaction increased. This could indicate that as principals attempted to address

underperformance, they felt more satisfied they were addressing teacher quality and doing something about it.

Lastly, barriers principals faced was also a significant finding related to principal job satisfaction. Principals who identified more barriers were less satisfied with their job performance and may have become overwhelmed with large barriers that may the job more difficult and challenging for them. The more barriers that principals valued or identified the more likely their job satisfaction decreased. This finding would be significant for school district leaders to understand and would be worthy of their consideration as school district leaders develop effective supervision and evaluation procedures.

Taken together, principal job satisfaction is related to opportunities for professional development, causes of underperformance, strategies to encourage teacher growth and development, and barriers to conducting this work. Principals seem to indicate they are willing to address instances of teacher underperformance, but these steps and strategies can often impact their job satisfaction. School district leaders could consider these findings and use them to understand how they can develop policies and procedures around teacher quality that could address underperformance, but not at the expense of placing more work and demands on the school principal. There are several areas for school district leaders to consider which have implications from this research and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

# CHAPTER 5

# DISCUSSION

This research study sought to understand characteristics principals value related to teacher underperformance. Additionally, this research identified strategies principals use with teachers who are underperforming as well as some barriers they encounter when they attempt to address teacher quality. While conducting this research, several limitations were identified, which should be considered. In addition, several areas for future research, which could strengthen the research on teacher quality, were identified. Lastly, this research has implications for both school district leaders as well as individual school principals as they attempt to address instances of teacher underperformance in the districts or schools they lead.

## Limitations

There are five potential limitations related to this research study and its findings. The first potential limitation was related to the methodology used in this research. Chiefly, positivist researchers tend to believe that reality is concrete and can be quantified (Rahman, 2016); however, other scholars have identified some limitations with this type of research approach. Specifically, Denzen and Lincoln (2011) described one potential limitation of quantitative research as that it may not identify deeper meaning or explanations to problems. Rahman (2016) further explained that quantitative research provides a snapshot of the problem and may not identify deeper meaning of the topic of research. Related to this specific study, this research did not offer explanations as to why principals valued various characteristics, strategies, or barriers, and this lack could be one

potential limitation. Identifying why principals may have valued certain characteristics, strategies or barriers could have provided depth to this research.

The second limitation related to this study was the potential for self-selection bias by participants. The experiences of the principals during the school year may have resulted in the participants choosing to be involved in this research. Principals who may have felt strongly about underperforming teachers may have opted to respond to the survey, while the lack of response from other principals in Pennsylvania could have impacted the results. This research had a response rate of 15.8% of all public-school principals in Pennsylvania. However, 2000 principals who could have opted to participate in this research did not respond to our survey and could have impacted the results.

A third potential limitation of this research was related to the use of surveys as a method of data collection. Survey responses may lack depth due to their design. Respondents reported how often they agreed with statements or valued items presented in the survey. Without more context, the survey may not provide the depth needed to understand all aspects of the phenomena of teacher underperformance. Additionally, the survey may have omitted some characteristics, strategies or barriers that principals may associate with underperformance, which could have impacted the results.

Additionally, the population of this research study included principals in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Results from this research may be difficult to generalize to other states. Specifically, individual states determine the supervision and evaluation process/guidelines for teachers, and each may have legal requirements that differ from those of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The survey in this research was limited to

specific information related to evaluation procedures in Pennsylvania and may be difficult to generalize.

A fifth limitation of this study was that respondents were not in a controlled setting when they completed the survey. Respondents also completed the survey during the month of July 2023. Respondents could have been distracted during the completion of the survey or may not have recalled specific instances associated with teacher underperformance due it being sent to them during the summer months. Additionally, respondents may have begun the survey on one day and returned to complete it on a second day, which may have impacted their responses. We did not gather specific data associated with the time it took participants to complete the survey, which was a potential limitation of this research.

In conclusion, despite the limitations mentioned here, this research study was successful in answering its main research questions. Chiefly, this study identified how principals valued/classified instances of teacher underperformance, the strategies principals used to address teacher underperformance, and the barriers they faced as they attempted the work of addressing teacher quality. Analysis of these responses also noted some differences between the way principals identified teachers that were underperforming, the strategies they used and the barriers they faced based upon various demographic features of the principal or the school. There are several areas worthy of consideration in future research.

## Further Research

One of the first areas recommended for future research is linked to one of the limitations of this study. This study was a quantitative research study that provided information about the perceptions of principals related to teacher underperformance. As mentioned previously, positivist researchers believe the world is concrete and an unchangeable reality that can be quantified through research (Rahman, 2016). One area of future research would be to conduct a similar study using qualitative methods. According to Corbetta (2003), reality can be socially constructed and can be changed or understood subjectively, which aligns with a qualitative research approach. Future research related to this study could be conducted by adding interviews with school principals who participate in the study. While generalizations from qualitative studies are limited, the interviews may allow for more context and depth related to the issues of teacher quality. A qualitative approach could help to identify deeper meanings, connections, or explanations to the phenomena of teacher underperformance, thus providing the basis for more robust quantitative study.

Secondly, future research related to the topic of teacher underperformance could attempt to understand how principals perceive and receive support from central office personnel around teacher evaluation and supervision. This study found that there were differences regarding when principals sought support or guidance from central office staff (e.g., superintendent, human resource department). Future research could attempt to identify when principals feel it is necessary to consult central office staff and why they feel they need to do so. In addition, this research could attempt to identify the type of

support that the central office provides, how that support is provided, and if principals determine it to be effective. Teacher quality is potentially an area of concern from all leaders, including central office personnel, and future research could attempt to understand how the central office supports principals in the work of addressing teacher quality.

Aside from the role of the school principal, future research could also attempt to understand the perceptions of teachers around the supervision and evaluation process. This research study concentrated on the perceptions of principals. Future research could attempt to analyze if there are differences between the perspectives of teachers and principals related to teacher underperformance. This type of future research could attempt to identify how teachers perceive underperforming colleagues and if they are impacted by underperforming peers. Furthermore, future research could focus on the experiences of teachers who have received underperforming ratings and how they experienced the strategies used by the school principal.

Furthermore, future research could be conducted to understand the variation in school district resources that are available to school principals as they attempt to address teacher quality. In this study, there were differences identified between the types of strategies school principals used, such as the use of instructional coaches. It would be worthy of future study to understand if additional resources are available to principals in some school districts, but not available to others. Additionally, further research could identify if the resources available to principals impact the types of strategies they use to address teacher quality. Similarly, future research could attempt to identify if there are

relationships between the wealth and available resources of a school district and the number of teachers receiving ratings of "needs improvement." It would be interesting for future research to compare the number of "needs improvement" ratings given to teachers in high-performing school districts (with a history of academic success) compared to school districts that are in various levels of corrective action from the Pennsylvania Department of Education due to a history of underperformance. This research could be conducted to determine if teachers that teach in high-performing schools or districts are less likely to receive "needs improvement" ratings than teachers in lower-performing districts.

A final area for further research could be to understand teacher turnover and its impact on schools. In this study, 175 (42.7%) of the participants identified a potential teacher shortage as a barrier to addressing underperformance. Related to all other barriers, this was not one that principals tended to value as a major barrier to them addressing teacher underperformance. Based on this, future research could examine the reasons why some teachers may leave the profession and whether those teachers that have left the profession did so because of principals addressing their performance in the classroom. It would be important for school leaders to identify if the strategies they use to increase teacher quality result in teachers leaving the profession or if their strategies result in teachers improving their performance.

There are several extensions that could be studied in relation to this research. Central office, teacher and principal perceptions around the supervision and evaluation process could impact future school leaders and would be worthy of additional research.

By extending the research questions addressed in this study, school leaders may gain access to additional information to assist them in providing high-quality instruction in the schools they lead.

## Implications

### Implications for School District Leaders

In this research study, it became clear that principals tended to value characteristics of teacher underperformance that could be directly observed by principals inside classrooms (i.e., poor classroom management skills, inability to express content clearly, and poor pedagogical skills). Items contained in the survey that were not able to be directly observed by principals—such as valued-added test scores (PVAAS) and negative collegial relationships—tended to be valued less as indicators of underperformance. This study also revealed that principals understood that the lack of time to address underperforming teachers was one of their biggest barriers. Correspondingly, principals also identified that a lack of support from the superintendent or school board was another barrier for them as they attempted to address teacher underperformance. Taken together, these findings suggest that it would be valuable for school district leaders to identify opportunities for principals to have time to routinely monitor teacher quality, to remove barriers for principals, and to provide support to principals as they attempt to address teacher underperformance. These implications could be addressed in several ways.

One specific district-level consideration for district leadership members could be for district leaders to offer additional professional development trainings for principals

specifically around the supervision and evaluation process. In the regression analysis for this research, it was clear that principals appeared to be more satisfied with their jobs when they had additional professional development opportunities around the supervision and evaluation process. A possible topic for professional development sessions offered by school district leaders could be inter-rater reliability trainings for principals. This research concluded that there were differences between the items principals valued as indicators of teacher underperformance. For example, more experienced principals tended to associate underperformance with poor clarity of content. Female principals tended to associate underperformance with low academic achievement by students. As a result, it could be reasonably assumed that a principal in one school may rate a teacher one way, but a principal in a different school could see similar behaviors in a teacher but may rate them differently. To help combat this potential inconsistency, it would be important for school district leaders to create professional development opportunities to assure that individuals conducting evaluations are trained in school district procedures and able to formally rate teachers in a consistent fashion.

A second implication of this research for school district leaders is also related to differences between the characteristics principals valued as indicators of underperformance. This study identified differences between what high school principals valued as underperforming characteristics (content knowledge) compared to elementary school principals (pedagogical skills). It could be helpful for district leaders to provide opportunities for principals to meet and discuss supervision and evaluation regularly. Such a routine meeting or professional development opportunity could lead to increased

job satisfaction for principals and might create cohesive policies around the supervision and evaluation process for the district. This process could result in principals sharing the evidence collected and collaborating with one another to identify how to rate teachers using the framework provided to Pennsylvania principals. This process could assure that principals at each level capture and rate teachers in a similar fashion.

A third implication for school district leaders based on this research is the need for district leaders to identify opportunities where they can provide principals with additional support or time to be able to address teacher underperformance. In this research, principals often stated that they did not have "time" to address instances of underperformance, but they valued the importance of continued documentation and consultation with the superintendent or human resources department. At the same time, principals in this study also indicated that they felt under-supported by the superintendent or school board. As a response, district leaders could examine district policies and consider how they may impact principal time. One suggestion related to this research is for district leaders to identify support members from the central office (e.g., special education supervisors, curriculum and instruction staff, pupil services supervisors) that could assist principals in conducting formal observations or walkthroughs of teachers. This strategy could potentially serve two purposes: additional people could conduct observations, and the additional support could help principals feel like they have gained "time" back in their workday because others would be sharing the workload of supervision and evaluation of teachers. By the same token, this strategy could also help principals feel like they have additional support from the central office (i.e., the

superintendent) as they address teacher underperformance. As noted previously, principals often identified that a lack of support from the superintendent or school board was a barrier. By providing guidelines that involve others assisting in the evaluation process, principals may feel more supported by the superintendent and school board. By district leaders offering support and conducting observations and walkthroughs, principals could feel like they may have more time to be able to address teacher underperformance and also feel more supported by school district leaders.

A fourth implication for school district leadership related to this research could be the use of impartial administrators to support principals. This study identified that in instances of underperformance, principals' continuing to document and collect evidence was the most common strategy used to address underperformance. Continued documentation takes time, which was also a significant barrier identified by principals in this study. School district leaders could develop district policies (if they do not exist) or redesign them to assure that in instances of underperformance, school principals are encouraged to ask an impartial administrator to review the evidence they have collected, and to potentially arrange for the third party to observe the teacher to verify or further strengthen the documentation of underperformance. By requiring principals to share documentation with colleagues, it could help to strengthen the evidence or documentation of underperformance and at the same time allow the principal to feel supported by district leaders. Also worthy of note, in this study, female principals seemed more apt to allow others to assist in addressing teacher underperformance than male principals. School district leaders could leverage their female principals' willingness to allow others to

support them in their work to potentially encourage all principals to use one another and the district resources to encourage teacher quality improvement. School district leaders could encourage their male principals to become willing to allow others to assist them in the work of addressing underperforming teachers.

The final implication for school district leaders is related to principals valuing that legal barriers were a major barrier for them in addressing teacher underperformance. One way for school district leaders to address this barrier is for them to identify ways principals can receive routine support from the human resources office or other legal services of the district. This support could include school district leaders developing policies around ways that the central office (e.g., the superintendent or human resources office) can become involved at the initial onset of teacher underperformance. For example, to address instances where a principal believes a teacher is underperforming, policies could be created or revised to specifically identify steps for the principal to take when there is a potentially underperforming teacher in their school. These steps should include if and when to involve the superintendent or the human resources department, and so forth. As mentioned earlier, these policies could include involving impartial administrators and/or using additional staff of the central office to conduct evaluations, all of which could further provide additional support to the principal in the process. Instead of the responsibility of addressing underperformance resting solely on the individual principal, district leaders could involve others much earlier in the supervision and evaluation process and could make principals feel more confident and less fearful of legal missteps they might make. Additionally, this process would assure that the evidence

and information gathered would stand up to challenges from the teacher's union, which principals identified as another major barrier for them. By developing policies that remove perceived barriers, principals may become more satisfied in their jobs and potentially more productive and confident in their work of addressing teacher underperformance.

Taken together, these implications highlight how school district leaders should consider ways they can involve more individuals in the supervision and evaluation process of underperforming teachers. By doing so, barriers such as a lack of time, perceived lack of support from the superintendent or school board, and legal issues associated with teacher underperformance could be mitigated, thus resulting in principals more satisfied in their jobs. Collectively, school district leaders could create (or revise) their supervision and evaluation plans to include additional members of the school district to support principals in this work. This process may communicate to the district at large that teacher quality is a district process and that all members of school district leadership are involved in this process.

**Implications for School Leaders**

This research suggests several implications for individual school leaders. The first implication for school leadership is related to time. In this study, school leaders identified that time played a major role in their inability to address teacher underperformance. School leaders could review the way they identify the time they spend to conduct formal and informal observations. School leaders may benefit from identifying dedicated and scheduled time in their school day to conduct classroom observations and walkthroughs

as part of their daily routine. By visiting classrooms routinely and scheduling them as part of their daily responsibilities, principals may be able to identify instances of underperformance early and offer immediate feedback and support before the issue becomes more challenging to address. Additionally, this type of routine classroom presence throughout the building on a consistent basis could allow principals to have a fuller vision of teacher quality inside the school.

Secondly, school leaders could also consider recruiting others from within the district to assist them in the evaluation and supervision of underperforming teachers. In this study, female principals were more apt to use resources like impartial administrators, instructional coaches, and the Employee Assistance Program to assist them with the process of addressing teacher underperformance. Principals could consider ways they can leverage others in the district to help them in the process of evaluating and supervising underperforming teachers. Specifically, principals could share their documentation with other principals to gather feedback on their evidence or could ask a colleague to conduct an observation or walkthrough of underperforming teachers to substantiate or improve their claims about the teacher's performance. This process could make principals more efficient in their use of time and could also allow principals to feel they have more support from colleagues as they attempt to address teacher underperformance.

A third implication of this study is related to district resources to improve teacher quality. This study identified that many principals consulted with the human resources department, superintendent or others in the district to assist with addressing underperformance by teachers, while others did not use this strategy as often.

Specifically, principals in rural and town school districts reported they consulted with the superintendent more often than urban and suburban principals. This could be a result of the size of the school district. Principals in larger districts may not have as much access to district leaders as principals in smaller school districts. As a response, school leaders should consider developing relationships with central office personnel to assist them in the supervision and evaluation process, by asking for help early on in the identification of underperforming teachers. Principals in larger school may not have the ability to connect directly with the superintendent or human resources department, but they could try to develop relationships with the individual who supervises principals or serves as the connection between schools and these larger departments to ask for advice, counsel, and potential resources to address teacher quality. By involving more members of the school district and developing relationships with school district personnel, the principal could have the ability to identify resources they may not have been aware of to support them and to avoid legal pitfalls around supervision and evaluation documentation.

## Conclusion

Teacher supervision and evaluation is a complex process with multiple variables for the principal to weigh. Principals must evaluate teachers in multiple grade levels and various subject areas, and they must consider a large amount of data available to them to use in assessing teacher performance. Coupled with the demands on a principal's "time" to deal with issues like student discipline, parental issues and other district-related issues, finding additional time to do the work of addressing teacher underperformance can be challenging for school leaders. It is also important to note that principals in Pennsylvania

appear to be leaving the profession at an alarming rate, which should be a cause of concern for district leaders. It seems they are signaling to school district leaders that the job is extremely challenging; instead of continuing to work through these challenges, some principals are choosing to leave the profession or accept jobs outside building leadership. If school districts are going to continue to provide quality educational programming for students, then school district leaders need to consider listening to the voice of the school principal, especially within the area of the supervision and evaluation of teachers. District leaders should look for opportunities to provide principals with more time to do the work of addressing teacher underperformance through increased collaboration and resource allocation. The role of addressing teacher underperformance cannot be the sole responsibility of the school principal. Principals are already burdened with multiple competing priorities, and district leaders need to find ways to allow principals to receive the support and resources to address teacher underperformance. By working together, district and school leaders can assure that schools are filled with competent teachers who provide the best educational opportunities for their students.

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## APPENDIX A

## EMAIL INQUIRY

Dear {inserted principal's name},

I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education program at Temple University, and a current principal of East Norriton Middle School in the Norristown Area School District.

I am writing to request your participation in a brief dissertation survey. My dissertation/study focuses on understanding the perceptions of school principals regarding the characteristics, strategies, and barriers faced while supervising teachers who need improvement.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and all your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. The survey will take about 5-10 minutes to complete. At the bottom of this email, you will find the informed consent information to allow you to understand this study in a more detail.

To complete the survey, please click the link below.

Survey link: [survey link]

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at [email address] or [email address]

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Hutchinson

Principal, East Norriton Middle School

Doctoral Candidate, Temple University

**RESEARCH SUBJECT CONSENT**

**Title:** Principal Perceptions of Teacher Quality- Identification, Barriers, and Strategies of Supervising Needs Improvement Teachers.

**Investigators:**

Principal investigator: Judith Stull, Ph.D., College of Education and Human Development [email address]

Student investigator: Jeffrey Hutchinson, M.S., College of Education and Human Development [email address]

**RESEARCH CONSENT SUMMARY**

You are being asked for your consent to take part in a research study. This document provides a concise summary of this research. It describes the key information that will help inform your decision whether to take part in this research.

**Why am I being invited to participate in this research?**

Principals play an important role in the supervision and evaluation of classroom teachers. As a school principal, your insight and information around the supervision and evaluation process is vital to understanding how principals use this process to address teacher quality. The goal of this study is to understand the perceptions of principals about the characteristics of teachers that need to improve, the strategies principals use with those teachers, and potential barriers that can hinder their ability to address the performance of teachers that need improvement.

**How long will I be in this research study?**

It is expected that participation in this research will take approximately 5-10 minutes and will involve the completion of an electronic survey. Collection of survey data will take place during the summer and early fall of 2023.

**What happens if I agree to participate in this research?**

Participants will complete a one-time 5-10-minute survey during the summer and fall of 2023. The survey will be the extent of involvement. Participants will be anonymous. Data will be collected through a Qualtrics survey.

**What are the risks of this research?**

There are no expected risks or discomfort for participating in this research.

**How can being in this research benefit me?**

It is not expected that participants will personally benefit from this research. Although participants can understand they are contributing to the literature on understanding supervision and evaluation procedures in the state of Pennsylvania.

**What happens to the information collected in this research?**

We may publish the results of this research. However, since your responses are anonymous, no identifying information will be included in the publication.

**Who can answer my questions about this research?**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this research you may email the research team members at the email addresses provided on page 1.

This research is being overseen by Temple University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB is a group of people who perform an independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at (215)707-3390 or may contact them via email at irb@temple.edu. You should contact IRB if:

· You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team.

· You are not getting answers or responses to your questions from the research team.

· You cannot reach the research team.

· You want to talk to someone else about this research.

· You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

**What happens if I agree to participate in this research, but decide later that I no longer want to participate?**

You may begin the survey and then change your mind and not complete it. Additionally, if you decide you would not like your survey responses to be included in this research you may contact the research team, and your response will be deleted.

## APPENDIX B

## PARTICIPATING SCHOOL DISTRICTS

| *School District* | Responses | Number of District Schools | Response Rate per District*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Abington School District | 1 | 9 | 11.11% |
| Abington Heights School District | 2 | 6 | 33.3% |
| *Admiral Peary Vocational School | 1 | 1 | 100% |
| Albert Gallatin Area School District | 3 | 8 | 37.5% |
| Allentown School District | 3 | 21 | 14.3% |
| Allegheny-Clarion Valley School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Altoona School District | 1 | 11 | 9.1% |
| Armstrong School District | 3 | 8 | 37.5% |
| Athens Area School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Avon Grove School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Beaver Area School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Bedford Area School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Bellwood-Antis School District | 3 | 3 | 100.0% |
| Bensalem Township School District | 2 | 9 | 22.2% |
| Berwick Area School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Bethlehem Area School District | 4 | 22 | 18.2% |
| Big Spring School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Blackhawk School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Blue Mountain School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Blue Ridge School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Bradford Area School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Brandywine Heights Area School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Brentwood Borough School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Bristol Township School District | 2 | 6 | 33.3% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Burrell School District | 6 | 4 | 150.0% |
| Cambria Heights School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Carbondale Area School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Carlisle Area School District | 2 | 10 | 20.0% |
| Centennial School District | 2 | 6 | 33.3% |
| Central Bucks School District | 2 | 23 | 8.7% |
| Central Cambria School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Central Dauphin School District | 2 | 19 | 10.5% |
| *Central Montco Technical School | 1 | 1 | 100% |
| Central Valley School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Central York School District | 1 | 7 | 14.3% |
| Chambersburg Area School District | 3 | 17 | 17.6% |
| Charleroi Area School District | 2 | 3 | 66.7% |
| Chartiers Valley School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Cheltenham School District | 1 | 7 | 14.3% |
| Chester Upland School District | 1 | 6 | 16.7% |
| Chestnut Ridge School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Clearfield Area School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Coatesville Area School District | 1 | 10 | 10.0% |
| Colonial School District | 2 | 7 | 28.6% |
| Commodore Perry School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Conemaugh Township School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Conestoga Valley School District | 2 | 6 | 33.3% |
| Connellsville Area School District | 1 | 6 | 16.7% |
| Conrad Weiser Area School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Cornwall-Lebanon School District | 1 | 6 | 16.7% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Corry Area School District | 3 | 4 | 75.0% |
| Coudersport Area School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Council Rock School District | 2 | 14 | 14.3% |
| Cranberry Area School District | 1 | 8 | 12.5% |
| Crawford Central School District | 1 | 11 | 9.1% |
| Cumberland Valley School District | 1 | 11 | 9.1% |
| Dallas School District School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Dallastown Area School District | 1 | 8 | 12.5% |
| Danville Area School District | 2 | 4 | 50.0% |
| *Delaware County Intermediate Unit | 1 | 1 | 100% |
| Delaware Valley School District | 2 | 7 | 28.6% |
| Donegal School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Dover Area School District | 2 | 6 | 33.3% |
| DuBois Area School District | 1 | 6 | 16.7% |
| East Penn School District | 3 | 10 | 30.0% |
| Eastern York School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Eastern Lancaster County School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Easton Area School District School District | 4 | 9 | 44.4% |
| Elizabethtown Area School District | 2 | 7 | 28.6% |
| Ellwood City Area School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Ephrata Area School District | 1 | 7 | 14.3% |
| Erie City School District | 7 | 15 | 46.7% |
| *Forbes Road Career and Technical School | 1 | 1 | 100% |
| Forest City Regional School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Fort Cherry School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Franklin Area School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Freedom Area School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Freeport Area School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Galeton Area School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Garnet Valley School District | 3 | 5 | 60.0% |
| General McLane School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Gettysburg Area School District | 2 | 5 | 40.0% |
| Great Valley School District | 2 | 6 | 33.3% |
| Greensburg Salem School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Greater Johnstown School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Greater Latrobe School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Greencastle-Antrim School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Grove City Area School District | 1 | 6 | 16.7% |
| Halifax Area School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Hamburg Area School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Hampton Township School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Harbor Creek School District | 4 | 5 | 80.0% |
| Haverford School District | 1 | 7 | 14.3% |
| Hazleton Area School District | 1 | 11 | 9.1% |
| Hempfield School District | 5 | 10 | 50.0% |
| Huntingdon Area School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| *Huntingdon County Career/Tech School | 1 | 1 | 100% |
| Indiana Area School District | 2 | 6 | 33.3% |
| Interboro School District | 2 | 6 | 33.3% |
| Jamestown Area School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Jenkintown School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Jim Thorpe Area School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Keystone Central School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Keystone Oaks School District | 6 | 5 | 120.0% |
| Knoch School District | 2 | 4 | 50.0% |
| Lakeview School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| *Lancaster Country Career/Tech School | 1 | 1 | 100% |
| *Lehigh Career/Tech School | 1 | 1 | 100% |
| Lewisburg Area School District | 1 | 8 | 12.5% |
| Lower Dauphin School District | 1 | 8 | 12.5% |
| Lower Merion School District | 1 | 10 | 10.0% |
| Lower Moreland School District | 2 | 3 | 66.7% |
| Manheim Central School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Marion Center School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Mars Area School District | 3 | 5 | 60.0% |
| Mechanicsburg Area School District | 1 | 8 | 12.5% |
| Meyersdale Area School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Midd-West School District | 3 | 4 | 75.0% |
| Mifflinburg Area School District | 1 | 7 | 14.3% |
| Millcreek Township School District | 1 | 9 | 11.0% |
| Millville Area School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Minersville Area School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Moniteau School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Montgomery Area School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Montour School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Montoursville Area School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Montrose Area School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Moon Area School District | 1 | 8 | 12.5% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| School District of Borough of Morrisville | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| School District of Lancaster | 1 | 19 | 5.3% |
| Moshannon Valley School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Mount Union Area School District | 3 | 4 | 75.0% |
| Mountain View School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Mount Lebanon School District | 2 | 10 | 20.0% |
| Mount Pleasant Area School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Nazareth Area School District | 5 | 6 | 83.3% |
| Neshaminy School District | 1 | 10 | 10.0% |
| New Brighton Area School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| New Kensington Arnold School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| New Hope-Solebury School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Norristown Area School District | 6 | 12 | 50.0% |
| North Clarion School District | 2 | 2 | 100.0% |
| North East School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| North Hills School District | 2 | 6 | 33.3% |
| North Penn School District | 3 | 17 | 17.6% |
| North Pocono School District | 3 | 5 | 60.0% |
| Northampton Area School District | 3 | 6 | 50.0% |
| Northeast Bradford School District | 2 | 2 | 100.0% |
| Northeastern York County School District | 1 | 8 | 12.5% |
| Northern Bedford County School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Northern Tioga School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Northern York County School District | 2 | 6 | 33.3% |
| Northwestern Lehigh School District | 2 | 4 | 50.0% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Norwin School District School District | 2 | 7 | 28.6% |
| Octorara Area School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Oil City Area School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Oley Valley School District | 2 | 3 | 66.7% |
| Oswayo Valley School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Owen J. Roberts School District | 4 | 7 | 57.1% |
| Oxford Area School District | 1 | 6 | 16.7% |
| Palisades School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Panther Valley School District | 2 | 3 | 66.7% |
| Penn Manor School District | 1 | 10 | 10.0% |
| Penn-Trafford School District | 1 | 6 | 16.7% |
| Penncrest School District | 1 | 6 | 16.7% |
| Pennridge School District | 1 | 11 | 9.1% |
| Pennsbury School District | 4 | 15 | 26.7% |
| Pequea Valley School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Perkiomen Valley School District | 2 | 7 | 28.6% |
| Peters Township School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Pine-Richland School District | 1 | 6 | 16.7% |
| Pittsburgh Public Schools | 7 | 56 | 12.5% |
| Pittston Area School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Pleasant Valley School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Pocono Mountain School District | 1 | 9 | 11.1% |
| Pottsgrove School District | 3 | 5 | 60.0% |
| Pottstown School District | 1 | 6 | 16.7% |
| Punxsutawney Area School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Quaker Valley School District | 3 | 4 | 75.0% |
| Quakertown Community School District | 2 | 8 | 25.0% |
| Radnor Township School District | 2 | 5 | 40.0% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reading School District | 1 | 19 | 5.3% |
| Red Lion Area School District | 1 | 8 | 12.5% |
| Richland School District | 1 | 8 | 12.5% |
| Ridgway Area School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Ringgold School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Riverside School District | 2 | 3 | 66.7% |
| Riverview School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Rose Tree Media School District | 3 | 6 | 50.0% |
| South Fayette School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Saint Marys Area School District | 2 | 5 | 40.0% |
| Salisbury - Elk Lick School District | 2 | 2 | 100.0% |
| Saucon Valley School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| School District of Philadelphia | 20 | 218 | 9.2% |
| Schuylkill Haven Area School District | 2 | 3 | 66.7% |
| Schuylkill Valley School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Scranton School District | 2 | 15 | 13.3% |
| Shaler Area School District | 1 | 7 | 14.3% |
| Shamokin School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Shenango Area School District | 2 | 2 | 100.0% |
| Shikellamy School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Slippery Rock Area School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Smethport Area School District | 2 | 2 | 100.0% |
| Somerset Area School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Souderton Area School District | 2 | 9 | 22.2% |
| South Allegheny School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| South Middleton School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| South Williamsport Area School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| South Eastern School District | 1 | 6 | 16.7% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Southeastern Greene School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Southern Huntingdon School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Southern Lehigh School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Southmoreland School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Seneca Valley School District | 4 | 8 | 50.0% |
| South Western School District | 1 | 6 | 16.7% |
| Springfield School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| School District of Springfield Township | 2 | 4 | 50.0% |
| State College Area School District | 1 | 11 | 9.1% |
| Stroudsburg Area School District | 1 | 7 | 14.3% |
| Tamaqua Area School District | 2 | 4 | 50.0% |
| *Technical High School (CCIU) | 1 | 1 | 100% |
| Troy Area School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Tulpehocken School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Tussey Mountain School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Twin Valley School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Tyrone Area School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Union City Area School District | 2 | 3 | 66.7% |
| Union School District | 2 | 2 | 100.0% |
| Unionville-Chadds Ford School District | 1 | 6 | 16.7% |
| Upper Dublin School District | 1 | 6 | 16.7% |
| Valley Grove School District | 1 | 2 | 50.0% |
| Valley View School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Wallenpaupack Area School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Wallingford Swarthmore School District | 2 | 5 | 40.0% |
| Warwick School District | 1 | 6 | 16.7% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Wattsburg Area School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| Waynesboro Area School District | 1 | 6 | 16.7% |
| West Allegheny School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| West Branch Area School District | 1 | 3 | 33.3% |
| West Chester Area School District | 1 | 17 | 5.9% |
| West Mifflin Area School District | 1 | 4 | 25.0% |
| Wilkes-Barre Area School District | 1 | 8 | 12.5% |
| Williamsport Area School District | 3 | 8 | 37.5% |
| Wilson School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Woodland Hills School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Wyoming Area School District | 3 | 4 | 75.0% |
| Wyoming Valley West School District | 2 | 7 | 28.6% |
| Wyomissing Area School District | 3 | 3 | 100.0% |
| *York County Technical School | 1 | 1 | 100% |
| Yough School District | 1 | 5 | 20.0% |
| Total | 410 | | 100% |

*a non-traditional school. Most of the responses of this type were from high school level Career and Technical schools or Intermediate Unit schools.
**more than one school leader in a school responded, or the principal may have responded twice. We were unable to determine why 6 principals responded in a district with only 4 schools.
***calculated according to the NCES/CCD number of schools in a district
*Note*. There were 244 school districts represented in the sample out of 499 school districts in the state of Pennsylvania for a district response rate of 48.8%.

## APPENDIX C

## PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS BASED UPON INTERMEDIATE UNIT

| *Intermediate Unit Name* | Intermediate Unit Number | Responses |
|---|---|---|
| Intermediate 1 | 1 | 11 (2.7%) |
| Pittsburgh-Mt. Oliver | 2 | 7 (1.7%) |
| Allegheny | 3 | 27 (6.6%) |
| Midwestern | 4 | 16 (3.9%) |
| Northwest Tri-County | 5 | 22 (5.4%) |
| Riverview | 6 | 11 (2.7%) |
| Westmoreland | 7 | 15 (3.7%) |
| Appalachia | 8 | 19 (4.6%) |
| Seneca Highlands | 9 | 9 (2.2%) |
| Central | 10 | 5 (1.2%) |
| Tuscarora | 11 | 6 (1.5%) |
| Lincoln | 12 | 17 (4.1%) |
| Lancaster-Lebanon | 13 | 19 (4.6%) |
| Berks | 14 | 10 (2.4%) |
| Capital Area | 15 | 14 (3.4%) |
| Central Susquehanna | 16 | 11 (2.7%) |
| BLaST | 17 | 11 (2.7%) |
| Luzerne | 18 | 12 (2.9%) |
| Northeastern | 19 | 16 (3.9%) |
| Colonial | 20 | 22 (5.4%) |
| Carbon-Lehigh | 21 | 13 (3.2%) |
| Bucks | 22 | 21 (5.1%) |
| Montgomery | 23 | 26 (6.3%) |
| Chester | 24 | 14 (3.4%) |
| Delaware | 25 | 16 (3.9%) |
| Philadelphia | 26 | 20 (4.9%) |
| Beaver Valley | 27 | 5 (1.2%) |
| ARIN | 28 | 7 (1.7%) |
| Schuylkill | 29 | 8 (2.0%) |
| Total | | 410 (100%) |

## APPENDIX D

## SURVEY/DATA COLLECTION TOOL

**1. What is your gender?**
**2. What is the name of your school district?**
**3. With what race or ethnicity do you identify?**

**4. What SUBJECT(s) did you teach when you were a classroom teacher?**

- Elementary subjects in a self-contained classroom
- Mathematics
- Reading, English or English Language Arts
- Science
- Social Studies
- Related Arts (e.g., Art, Computer/Technology, Music, Health and PE etc.)
- Non-classroom teacher (e.g., Counselor, Reading or Math specialist)
- Special Education

**5. In what year did you become a full-time principal?**

**6. What type of school do you lead? (Charter, Traditional public school, Other)**

**7. What grade band does your school serve?**

**8. How many years have you served as:**

| *Years of experience* | 0 years | 1-4 years | 5-9 years | 10-14 years | 15 or more years |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher | | | | | |
| Assistant Principal | | | | | |
| Principal | | | | | |
| Central Office | | | | | |
| Other: | | | | | |

**9. In any of your leadership preparation coursework, was any of the following covered?**

| *Leadership coursework* | Yes, but it really isn't needed | Yes | No | No, but it would have been a good idea |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher evaluation strategies | | | | |
| Addressing teacher performance issues | | | | |
| Ethical leadership | | | | |
| Crisis management | | | | |

**10. In any of your job embedded professional development was any of the following content covered?**

| *Job embedded professional development* | Yes, but it really isn't needed | Yes | No | No, but it would have been a good idea |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher evaluation strategies | | | | |
| Addressing teacher performance issues | | | | |
| Ethical leadership | | | | |
| Crisis management | | | | |

**11. Does your school organization have an official teacher code of conduct? (Yes, No, Other)**

**12. About what percentage of your time in a typical week is spent on. Remember the percentages may not sum to or may exceed 100% as your activities vary week to week.**

| *Principal tasks* | 0% | 1-25% | 26-50% | 51%-75% | 76% and higher |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Internal administrative tasks (reports, budget) | | | | | |
| Curriculum and teaching related tasks (e.g. observations, grade level meetings, mentoring teachers | | | | | |
| Student interactions (discipline and academic guidance) | | | | | |
| Teacher interactions | | | | | |
| Parent interactions both formal and informal | | | | | |
| District interactions (e.g. meetings) | | | | | |
| Other: | | | | | |

**13. Is one of your responsibilities supervising and evaluating teachers?** (Yes, No)

**14. Who ASSISTS you with completing the required observations and evaluations of teachers within the school? (multiple answers)**

- Assistant Principal
- Outside District staff (e.g. members of the district's curriculum department, Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent etc.)
- Support staff who work inside the school (e.g.; instructional coaches, lead teachers etc.
- Other (please specify)
- I am the only individual responsible for completing formal observations and evaluations in my school.

**15. During the last school year (2022 - 2023), which of the following sources of information on teacher performance did your school use in teacher evaluations?**

| *Sources of evaluation evidence* | Yes, but it really isn't needed | Yes | No | No, but it would have been a good idea |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| In-person classroom observations | | | | |
| Videotaped classroom observations | | | | |
| Peer or mentor teacher assessment | | | | |
| Teacher self-assessment | | | | |
| Teacher participation in professional development | | | | |
| Teacher practice or portfolio artifacts | | | | |
| Student surveys | | | | |

**16. Please consider how important each item is in terms of identifying a teacher who needs improvement.**

| *Teacher behaviors* | Very important | Important | Somewhat important | Unimportant | Very unimportant |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lack of subject matter knowledge. | | | | | |
| Lack of pedagogical knowledge. | | | | | |

Inability to express content clearly.

Inability to teach the district curriculum.

Inability to construct effective lesson plans.

Inability to construct class assessments**.**

Lack of effective classroom assessments.

Low level of student academic achievement.

Low individual teacher PVASS growth scores.

Ineffective classroom management skills.

Parental complaints
Inability to focus on following student IEPs.

Negative collegial relationships.

Resistance to school or district-wide initiatives.

Refusal to follow school rules for teachers

Poor professional judgement

Poor attitude towards teaching responsibilities

Poor attendance

Other:

**17. When you have experienced an underperforming teacher on your staff, what reason(s) to you attribute to their performance?**

| *Reasons for underperformance* | Very often | Often | Occasionally | Seldom | Never |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Personal health issues | | | | | |
| Family issues | | | | | |
| Financial issues | | | | | |
| Teacher inability to face the issue | | | | | |
| Teacher lost interest in teaching | | | | | |
| Teacher does not like current job | | | | | |

**18. What do you think is the most often reason for teacher under performance?**

**19. How commonly have you used the following with a teacher you have identified as needing improvement?**

| *Strategies to address underperformance* | Very often | Often | Sometimes | Occasionally | Rarely | Never | Does not apply |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ask the teacher to accept another teaching assignment in the same school | | | | | | | |
| Ask the teacher to teach a different grade in the same school | | | | | | | |
| Transfer teacher to another grade without consent | | | | | | | |
| Transfer teacher to another school without consent | | | | | | | |
| Assign a mentor | | | | | | | |
| Seek assistance from an impartial administrator to collect evidence of a teacher's performance | | | | | | | |

Seek guidance from HR on next steps to take

Use district or school-based instructional coaches to work with the teacher

Consult with the superintendent or assistant superintendent on what to do

Continue to collect teaching performance evidence

Create a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)

Increase teacher workload to encourage teacher resignation or retirement

Support strategy of offering a case settlement to encourage the teacher to resign

Encourage the teacher to use the employee assistance program

Other: _____

**20. Please indicate barriers that prevent principals from addressing the performance of a teachers who needs improvement.**

| *Barriers for principals* | Very unimportant | Unimportant | Somewhat unimportant/ Somewhat important | Important | Very important |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Legal and other expenses | | | | | |
| Required administrative time | | | | | |
| Difficulty collecting documentation | | | | | |
| Protection from professional teaching associations (e.g. NEA, AFT) | | | | | |
| Unclear definition of "needs improvement" | | | | | |
| Principal's lack of resolve | | | | | |
| Lack of support from Superintendent or Board | | | | | |
| Principal's lack of skill | | | | | |
| Teacher shortage making replacement difficult | | | | | |

Lack of evaluation process training

Potential impact on the rest of the teaching staff

Potential impact on the future relationship between the principal and the teacher

Other:

---

**21. At any point in your career, have you ever rated a teacher with an end of year overall final rating of:**

| | Yes | No | No, but I wish I had |
|---|---|---|---|
| Needs Improvement | | | |
| Failing | | | |

**22. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Indifferent | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The stress and disappointments involved with being a principal at this school aren't really worth it. | | | | | |
| I am generally satisfied with being the principal of this school. | | | | | |

I am generally satisfied
with being a principal
in general.

If I could get a higher
paying job I'd leave
this one as soon as
possible.

I think about transferring
to another school.

I don't seem to have as
much enthusiasm now
as I did when I began
this job.

I think about just staying
home from school because
I am too tired to go.

I think about transferring
out of this school district.

The COVID pandemic
made this job much harder.